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KUNAPIPI

VOLUME III NUMBER 2
1981

Kunapipi



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Kunapipi is a continuation of *Commonwealth Newsletter* and is published twice a year, Summer and Winter, by Dangaroo Press, Department of English, University of Aarhus. It is a journal of creative and critical writing concerned with the new literatures written in English. The major concentration is on the present and former Commonwealth countries but this is in no way exclusive. Articles and reviews on related historical and sociological topics will also be included as well as graphics and photographs.

The journal is the bulletin for the European branch of the Association of Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies. As such it offers information about courses, conferences, visiting scholars and writers, scholarships, and literary competitions.

The editor invites creative and scholarly contributions. Manuscripts should be double-spaced with footnotes gathered at the end, should conform to the MHRA (Modern Humanities Research Association) Style Sheet and should be accompanied by a return envelope.

All correspondence — manuscripts, books for review, inquiries — should be sent to:

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Printed and published by Dangaroo Press
Copyright 1981 by KUNAPIPI
ISSN 0106-5754



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VOLUME III NUMBER 2

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Kunapipi refers to the Australian aboriginal myth of the Rainbow Serpent which is the symbol both of creativity and regeneration. The journal's emblem is to be found on an aboriginal shield from the Roper River area of the Northern Territory in Australia.

Kunapipi is published with the assistance of the Literature Board of the Australia Council, the European branch of the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies, and the English Department, University of Aarhus.

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E.A. Markham

LIFE AFTER SPÉRACÊDES (FOR DIANA)

'Y'all take care, y'hear!' (Man in a Boston liquor store)

I
I am writing from a new address.

You, too, are stranger to your apartment. So much
has changed since last year. To friends

we're apart in much the same way as before,
except that a year, coming between us,
has allowed ego to burn grey

self-consuming, to lie dormant
for the rest of a life-time. You disdain such sophistry:
absence must mean more than that. And yet
I find the hackneyed image of ruined life
too close for comfort, anatomy turned to ash, my life
as *Music Hall*: would you, this missing year

have put a cool tongue where it burns,
with body-shade

tamed it for domestic heat?

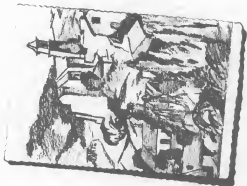
By being here, together, spilling here

the juice that makes things grow, couldn't we
smother last year's calculation, and defy
the new round of tremors?

It is another year without family.
Our answer — we have not, will not become strangers —
is well known. Too well known.

I write to a house in a street,
your new setting, selective as a postcard.
We are, for the moment, tourists
exchanging notes. More than guilt drives us
back to where addresses coincide: I am recalling
a walk up the hill

to Cabris, our Cezanne village, lived in.



Up the hill from another village we learnt to spell
and, for a time, called home. Then, we were envied.
That Mediterranean ripening saw us through

cooler seasons, separation
to others. Across the sea we spoke, we *speak*
of the *coup* of saying
what the foreign tongue allowed, and of *knowing* the rest.
More than a little, that allayed fear
that we could be cheated, that had we lived

separated by centuries as well as by sea
we might not know this life together.

So in five days, or ten days, if there is no accident
you will open your envelope
and be on our terrace with a view of the sea;
you will marvel at the oliviers, silvery after rain;
with a friend, defy the sun
up the hill to Cabris — the cicada losing its menace
from the famous poem: in your hand *l'asperge*
growing into lunch. Somewhere in this letter
will be the early-morning smell of croissants
and a swim, near-by, where people whom the world knows
have swum.

These are not attempts to nudge memory,
not straws that friends glance at, guardedly.
They are yours, without this letter. They speak
of shared address, a suitcase left, a plan for home.

'Why do you want to fight wars? It is not amusing.' (a Stockholm friend)

2

Now this year's address says nothing to you,
nothing of me to you. I think of postcards:

Wish you were here. All speak
English here. They tell jokes
in the shops. The jokes have
little to do with their lives —
that, perhaps, keeps them
cheerful ... Love.

But this is a card to someone encountered
at work, at an amusing party; or perhaps
further back in history — a fellow-sufferer in the Plato

seminar, or in numbing hours transliterating
Beowulf; someone defying probability after two decades
rising now to middling eminence. This card

is for such a twice-a-year acquaintance. It is not yours.

*'... Apart from religious ceremonies, triduumms, novenas, gardening,
harvesting, vintaging, whippings, slavery, incest, hangings, invasions,
sackings, rape and pestilence, we have had no experience.'* (Sister
Theodora in Italo Calvino's *The Nonexistent Knight*)

3

We are not the centre of the universe. Do not make
this statement for effect, it will fall flat,
your listeners will accept it. I have learned

to conceal surprise — as you your anger.
I sometimes think to go half-way and meet
those who will write the world's meaning

into separation — to make you less angry?
I hold the pen, but the voice, insistent, is behind
my ear ... *Dear Comrade, Widow, Fellow-sufferer...*

*... they have come again .. in the night ..
and have gone away, like last night
empty-handed.*

*Professionals; they will not kill till
they are ready, rather cannibalize the Will
to resist. They aim to prove me unappetizing
harvest of the hurricane, the mistral, green-ripening
to no purpose .. Conscious again, I take care
to block out the rest, the coming fear
with, yes, a walk up the hill between our villages
picking l'asperge, safe in private languages
not in this letter.*

My Love.

(It is better.)

They make me say this. I let them.
But no more. You are in a strange place.
You cannot be sure how much of this is cheap revenge
on the past. Do not over-react.

'Unless you and I fornicate in front of everybody, people aren't going to think we get along.' (Barbara Walters to Co-Anchor, Harry Reasoner on the ABC Evening News)

4

You do not recall last year in Spéracèdes, in Cabris.

(...It was not last year, you're growing literal. Two, *three* American Presidents have, as they say, risen without trace. Our own obscurity is worse, it has no cushion of sympathy, of gloating, of contempt...)

No, you do not recall that last year in Spéracèdes,
in Cabris: I am a messenger, then, with unwelcome news.
Those who, like us, sojourned there

have moved on. Unlike us they took care
to drive piles into the stubborn mountain-side
and now sprout children. They, like us

went through the motions, tying up the vines
picking the courgettes, learning ancient craft
with stones on terraces to prevent our patch
of *Alpes Maritimes* sliding into sea.

That was another life, you say, an address
better to forget: these letters are like children's
balloons running out of air. So my next note
must break a window or pull you up short,
like a terrorist in the body, with a knife. Our life
in the village, I say, is a risk. Others
went through the motions but

unlike us, paused
at a tempting vine

and bruised it, in a private place.
They packed earth in a hollow stone
and watered it. They diverted the stream

to a secret terrace, and with springwater
wash what now looks like a baby's face. Their *public*
lives, only, wear suitcases like ours...:

they leave Spéracèdes, they leave Cabris
with more than luggage. They have no need
for letters soggy with memory.

Let us be angry at the same time, and act together
united in this annual letter to our friends:

Dear folks,

*I hope you are well, hope that this year's ün
rouge still rots the liver. Hope you can
find contemplation on your hillside
despite over-building, still see Cannes
in the distance. Love, as ever, to your summer tide
of drifters, buoyant with concern for those who starve
as they slowly, expertly, empty the cave.*

'Having no talent is no longer enough.' Gore Vidal

'When I hear the word "Culture", I reach for my revolver.' Herman
Goering

'What I fear more than selling out, is wearing out.' Norman Mailer

5

(a letter from Albania)

Some have been returned because of their obviousness.
Neither of us now is known at his, at her address. It is right
that fastidiousness drives us into hiding. Stray and fading

memories add indignity, only, to a half-life, misspent.
But for the drug which lures me to the more perfect, more
remote place from which to say, 'Come home', I would not

still bother you. Like any addict needing *more*
to restore the dye of memory, I blunder into

secrets:

(Assassinations, Revolutions, far-away
wars are part of what those who live
live with)

Have I wandered off the map?



Week Two

My love,

Here we are back in Durrës, on the Adriatic coast.
Sunday. Diplomats, mainly 'Third World', on the beach..

A resort, built by Russians before the big breach
let China in (& out). Hotel too large for its
size; candelabra in the dining-room; on hands and knees

women keep it clean. Our guide, Naim, who sees
all, finds no contradiction in this 'Naked Ape' scene.
An alert, intelligent man, he talks of Albanian gold

stolen by Britain: what to expect from old
capitalists? He is not angry, just vindicated
that a country with racism as its leading industry

no longer needs him to condemn it in the eyes of History.

Tuesday

One of our group, a moody lad who came on a dare, doesn't
like it much. None of it. The Thousand Stairs of Gjirokastra,

the famous white cheese, isn't a patch on his native Leicester.
But there are compensations; yesterday's trip to
raw-faced Korça, new flats for its 60,000 inhabitants,

uncovered what we long sought, our first dissidents,
schoolmaster & (absent) wife defying the Party, calling
a halt at two children. And more, allowing the younger

to use her 'dextrous' left hand to write. But stronger
logic than we display — he warns us, he is no 'wet' — is needed
to resolve the contradictions we call *choice*: (For what

it's worth, that conversation took place not
at Korça where the tourist 'ruin' was Turkish, but in leafy
Elbasan. Lamb for lunch. Good cognac, too) Would you say

to a child there were *two* ways to walk? That is to play
with life, the man said. But enough. Talking of play, *Look!*
right here in the town, you can see Shakespeare,

a shrewd Englishman, to set his Comedy in Illyria,
our homeland, hedging, as you say, his bets. And is it true
that whites in England black their faces, like cheats,

making the real Othellos play out their parts in the streets?
He is sorry, he seeks only information. I am a guest, we must
enjoy the scenery, the War Memorial, Roman Ruins...

'Lateral Thinking & West Indian Sport' Essay by A.E.N. Von Hallett on
a proposed Grenada-Albanian Cricket Match.

*'The Art of Government is Pushin' up you han', Pushin' up you han' and
then bowl'ing a straight ball'* Cricket enthusiast, Sturge Park, Montserrat.

Friday

the country
is like Montserrat of an earlier decade: the hoe, the odd donkey..
but for mountains with Party slogans, the tidiness
of everything, children scrubbed and well-behaved, larger

than their parents. Another success for Comrade Enver Hoxha
breaking the centuries-long cycle of malnutrition.
Thinking we're a Delegation, people wave; we feel such frauds

and want to help with the harvest. We elude our guards
as they seem; but spring-onion fields are out of bounds
this year. So are the bunkers, each with its gun

to defend Democracy, not for jaded tourists' fun.
(Be warned, Yugoslavia, and others with dollars and roubles;
heroic soldiers holding hands in the street, strong

and unselfish, know how often Albanian freedom must be won.)

A change of driver to the Capital. He's been abroad
but still does his annual spell of 'productive labour':

he can drive, but we suspect him of being in High favour.
Tirana. Looking down from the hotel on Skanderbeg square,
a Lowry scene. Then to the Atheist Museum where ex-King Zog

vies for ignominy with Popes, U.S. Presidents and other relatives of God.
Unreal without cars; people dwarfed by the Palace of Culture;
Chinese bicycles, Chinese jokes .. In time, we see a pram

pushed by a foreign lady, and a non-Albanian man...

Love.

'We met the enemy, and he was us' (General William Westmoreland on
Vietnam)

6 (a letter not sent)

Why should I tell you that fascists and torturers
are alive and well — to divert attention from ourselves?

My love, I hope your new kettle turns itself off.
Our last adventure with a kettle served us
privately with such stories as others dine out on.
I should not like you to duplicate such intimacies.

My love, step back from the passing car, my hand
on your elbow: cross the square at night, only in dream,
to break up the fight. Do not get killed
should you cross with your eyes open

as we did at *Ebertplatz*, adding years to life;
(do you need a decade's rest after such lunacies together?)
My love, do not stop fights in the street. Unless..
No, fake innocence, selfishness, youth

and deal with the bad conscience at leisure:
it is irresponsible to die while fascists and torturers etc. etc.
So there. Do not read foolish letters. Ignore them.
Change more than your name. Go to live in another century.
My love.



E.A. MARKHAM

The Albania Connection

'They must be embarrassed that you're coming!' the woman said. It wasn't a joke for she had no sense of humour that he could detect. She was giving her usual wifely support. According to her, the country was rubbing itself out of the international statistics in order to brace itself for the Philpot invasion.

Philpot merely smiled. The voice was Maureen's, but it was dictated by someone else — her lover, one of her women...

Maureen was holding a little red pamphlet from which she drew satisfaction: statistics like Yugoslavia with its 22.50 million inhabitants at 3.70 per household doing better than, say, Bulgaria with its 1.015 thousand sales of watches and clocks in 1977. She went on in this vein, accompanying him as he packed.

'Albania? ... Albania! ... You mean Albania?' They were younger and more suggestive than his wife — particularly the first one; and it reassured Philpot in a way: he didn't have to make tiresome distinctions between one lot and another lot taking him for granted. It was the great Cooke's Travel Agents that he was disturbing now. He leant nonchalantly against the counter betraying neither impatience nor, he hoped, smugness, as the professionals set about finding out where Albania was.

Maureen's voice, her attitude, drifted back to him. The put-down was no longer that of a woman who worked in a belt factory in Great Portland Street, it was of a woman who was learning to say No in middle life; who took to visiting women she used to dislike; who was a confidante and pen-pal (and who knows what other type of pal?) of the Professor in question. It was of a woman who had refused rum on her *fortieth* birthday and had turned into a Philosopher vowing to *develop* a reading habit, so that she could *change* it.

It still made Philpot smile. When Maureen gave herself airs like that, he knew he wasn't defeated. He still knew a way to, well, make her defer her education, at least until morning, till daylight.

His smile spread to the young Miss and Mrs Cookes struggling to map Albania for him. He nodded encouragement, they nodded back and continued their search. He could wait. He had been ahead of them all along. Way back there — oh, fifteen years before when the question was first put to him (a statement, really), when the spy had approached him in Selfridges, he had had an idea where Albania was. Even *then*, OK, he wasn't a graduate; in his mind he had put it a bit further *East*, and not quite so close to Greece, but he *had an idea* where it was.

The Cooke's women were looking in their little, or rather their large black folders, contradicting one another before one of them came up with the answer.

'You do mean Albania?'

As he had said it three or four times, and they had repeated it after him, he concluded that he meant Albania. Certainly now, if not before;

and that maybe a few words in Albanian wouldn't come amiss in this situation. That's where his education had let him down. He wasn't ashamed to admit it, he was illiterate in the Albanian language. That's where the Professor scored. Philpot had no doubt that the great man could shop in the language by now, or farm in it, or do whatever they did in those parts. Undoubtedly, the Professor would now be speaking West Indian with an Albanian accent. Pity he wasn't available to mystify the young Miss Cookes. When last heard of the Professor was still in Yugoslavia. At Belgrade airport, waiting for a 'plane to Tirana. That was either three years ago or eighteen months ago depending on who was telling it; and Philpot assumed that the scholar had made it by now. But he didn't come here to gossip.

He merely said that he meant Albania, and so the Romania '80 brochure with the large, smiling girl on the front with goose-pimples and thin, dark-coloured *don't think about it don't think about it* bra and pants, weren't what he was after. Even the saucy blemish under her right breast couldn't detain him. (As a matter of fact, he knew lots of women with blemishes on their bodies, he was interested in the other kind: he was old-fashioned.) OK, OK, the Yugotours had some of the other kind: and pages 122 to 125 couldn't lightly be brushed aside by any self-respecting man who wasn't queer: naturalist holidays being the polite name for it. But back to business.

A senior Mr Cooke, an obvious Cooke of importance — one who could by no stretch of Philpot's imagination be found cavorting in the all-together on the beaches of Yugotours '80, came up with the information that there was no through flight to ... and here no one seemed to know the name of the country's capital (Philpot felt it wasn't his place to educate the public: he wasn't running for office). Anyway, there was no direct flight: Philpot would have to change at Athens. No, sorry, not Athens. Mr Cooke had been reading the wrong line. Would Philpot mind — did he mind changing planes at Belgrade?

He was thinking up pass-words for the Professor at Belgrade airport. 'Do you shop at Selfridges?' or 'Is the laundrette open?' And the Professor would say something like, 'Is that «Laundrette» with a capital L?'

Feeling good about this, he told Mr Cooke he welcomed the opportunity to change planes at Belgrade on account of the Professor.

The poor fellow didn't follow. He was the sort of Cooke who, in Philpot's shoes in Selfridges fifteen years before, would have panicked when the under-cover agent told him that Albania wanted to join the Commonwealth.

Philpot indicated there was no need to panic, the Professor was a brother, really, and had been waiting at Belgrade airport for between eighteen months and three years.

Of course, you know the English; you know how it is when they think they've got you taped, and then you outsmart them, *out-think* them. All the Cookes started exchanging those slow, careful, near-mystical glances with one another; and this led to renewed inspection of Philpot's clothes and strapless shoulder-bag, in an attempt to make him feel shabby and foreign. One of them — a younger girl Cooke, suppressing laughter in a way which made her breasts leap about painfully, asked if he knew he needed clearance to go to Albania. Half-distracted, he remembered to be courteous. He reminded them that all countries demanded clearance; he didn't expect Albania to be different from Britain in that respect. If they really wanted to know, he'd been cleared, ah, ten years previously. He was only waiting for a flight.

The glances were different now; there was a caution to their interest and expressions were a little closed. The little Cooke's breasts no longer jumped about. Their speech now had a slight sting, the true, authentic ring of England. He thanked them, took the brochures for Romania '80 and Yugoslours and informed no one in particular that he would go by train.

Maureen's post-card had arrived eighteen months before from Belgrade. That's all they had to go on, and Maureen, without saying so, feared the worst; she feared another Hungary. Philpot feared it too — if that was the word. He didn't want Maureen distracted in that way, that only spelt trouble for the husband. They still played the old game of laying claim to the Professor. He was Maureen's because she had once attended a few of his Evening classes; he was Philpot's because they met at a cricket match. The couple fought over it. Particularly during Hungary.

But Hungary was a long way behind them, wasn't it? They had patched that up and seen the Professor off at Heathrow armed with his first halting words of Albanian. This time there would be no mistake, no detour. But that was three years ago, and now Philpot had to act. It was a case of the unlettered man wading in where the learned Professor etc. etc. That would be the test of Maureen's loyalty.

But it was his show, dammit. 1966. Or was it '68? Christ, he had to rescue this thing from History. Anyway, rain had washed out the Test Match depriving West Indies of yet another victory at Lords. Philpot had got on the wrong bus and ended up in Oxford Street; and for no reason

in particular, had drifted into Selfridges. He was killing time, minding his own business, moving with the crowd, when this man sort of sidled up and whispered in his ear. This being England, Philpot's first thought was to fear for his body. But the man — under his moustache and perfume, well-spoken in an English sort of way — repeated his non-sexual message. 'Albania', he said, 'wants to join the Commonwealth.' Well, Philpot must have just glanced round to make sure that the man had meant this for him; and as he turned back to find out more, he was just in time to see his contact disappearing among the shop-lifters.

Later, friends listened to his account and were sympathetic; anyone could be excused for having hallucinations when the weather yet again intervened to frustrate West Indies hopes. It was a good two years before the Professor owned up. He too had been approached by Albania. Not the same man. His man was a musician, in the loo of the British Museum, with a proposal the Professor couldn't refuse.

Clearly, it was the wrong thing to argue over the Professor, that's what the woman wanted. It would devalue Philpot's trip, make it personal. Yet, he'd have her know that it wasn't he who had mixed up Albania and Hungary. He looked at it this way. Hungary put you in mind of food. It just didn't sound right for someone to come up to you in Selfridges and say, 'Hungary wants to join the Commonwealth'. You'd suspect a joke. A joke in bad taste. Irony. Starving Indians (begging Mrs Gandhi's pardon) and all that. The Professor's musician had had nothing to do with Albania (the fraud later admitted this, claiming the real Albanian had approached him in a lift at Manchester Polytechnic, after the Old Trafford Test).

The musician, in the loo at the British Museum, had wanted the Professor to marry his sister back in Hungary. British citizenship. They were well-to-do people, the prospective in-laws, left over from the Revolution. Big house. Own grounds. Musicians all. And the Professor was to go over, spend a couple of months with the family and be seen in public with the girl, etc. Then announce the engagement and come back to England. After a decent interval, go back and marry her. At a price.

The Professor had taken his time in saying No, while Maureen threshed about with a raised consciousness embarrassing everyone. First of all, she opposed the marriage on account of the danger. Then — when the Professor brought round a picture of the girl — she opposed it on grounds of colour: another white woman using a black man to get her way. Maureen was bitter. She accused Philpot; they were all in it

together. His Albanian foolishness was just a cover for the Hungarian bed. Transparent even for him. It was the colour that was driving them mad. And when the Professor finally said No to his Hungarian, Maureen was worse. Men ganging up on women: it wasn't that much to ask, was it? to put your name to a little piece of paper. But women were opening up their eyes. They were drawing their own conclusions; it was their fault, women, to rely on men for anything.

The Professor had spent that last night at their place — the night which saw the end of Hungary and the re-emergence of Albania — trying to placate Maureen, to calm her. Philpot thought it unnecessary, but he obviously couldn't act the jealous husband now.

He might have married the girl, the Professor admitted, as he hugged Maureen ... he might have done it if there was no money involved. But there was a principle, you see. A principle. He couldn't allow himself to be bought with *Florins*. Now, Philpot knew they were mad (or in love). The money would have been well-earned, there was danger in it. The Professor had lived in England too long, soon he'd be proposing to climb mountains just because they were *there*! The only real problem Philpot saw was having to live with the girl for two years, untouched, so that the annulment could go through. In the picture, she was reclining, chaste, in the garden of their home, flowers in bloom, not quite smiling. Yes, that would be difficult.

But Maureen was finally reconciled to her Professor. He'd spent half the evening droning on about his support for Women's Lib; and he also stressed his respect for the family in Hungary. He'd had a lovely holiday. Restful and educational. No real tension. In the evenings they talked Philosophy and listened to music, while he gently convinced them that he wasn't their man. In the end, he had given them the name of a German who might do it.

It wasn't pride that made Philpot angry, indignant. He was a partner in this thing or he wasn't. He too was prepared to take risks, and resented his not having been consulted. True, his brief was and remained Albania, but no one seemed to think of him in connection with doing the little Hungarian girl a service. If it was just a question of signing a piece of paper, a technicality, then his marriage to Maureen needn't be affected. No difficulty there. Not that he was *anxious* to do it, but he should have had first refusal. Obviously, they both saw him, they *all* saw him, not in the front line of the battle, not with the shock troops, but as a Camp Follower, always staring in the backs of others. He would have to disabuse them.

As was expected of him, he settled down to the Professor's lecture on Albania. What the hell, the fellow was on his way out of the country! Maureen was shamefully open to the charlatan. She sat entranced, sipping white wine, as her lover showed off, telling them all about Zog, the last Albanian King, bit of a rogue, apparently; and about how he'd been ripping Mussolini off. According to the Professor, Mussolini timed his invasion for the night Zog's wife was giving birth, only to be foiled by the wily upstart King. Zog made the Dictator look foolish by transferring his wife to a medical caravan and stripping the Palace bare. Before escaping to the soft life in America.

Maureen was, of course, into Military History and International Diplomacy — especially regarding the Balkan campaigns of World War II. Consciousness in the room was so high that Philpot felt his own work towards making Albania a member of the Commonwealth would be too prosaic for mention. He had checked at the Commonwealth Institute that Albania wasn't there, and had then started visiting libraries with a yellow crayon in his pocket; with a bit of luck, he'd start some little grass-roots movement among those who had time to look at maps.

But this seemed tame after Zog.

Unlike Maureen, he wouldn't sit around for eighteen months waiting for another post-card. He had, if you like, fifteen years' service behind him. If there were troops, he was equally responsible for their morale. Let the woman ridicule him. She feared he would succeed where the other had failed; that's why she refused to take his packing seriously. She had exhausted the statistics in her little red booklet. Yet she managed to look smug and superior. Maybe he should do his bit to raise her consciousness. She would have to respect that, the bitch. He couldn't wait to see her face when she woke up one morning and found that England wasn't where she lived but where an imaginative Philpot chose to put it. He'd make the bitch speak Albanian yet. And for the rest of her life.

Tomorrow he was off to Bristol where the Albanians had an office. He would persuade them that Maureen was neither a dog nor an American; and that her hair was not long, *naturally*, as she made it out to be.

In three weeks she'd be planting spring onions in Shkodra.

Calypso Allusions in Naipaul's *Miguel Street*

The lessons and the poems they write and send from England
Impress me they were trying to cultivate comedians.

(The Mighty Sparrow, 'Dan is the Man in the Van')

V.S. Naipaul's detached and often disdainful attitude to emergent societies has made him many enemies in the Third World and his portrayal of the black man is particularly problematic since it involves a level of aloofness and scorn not to be found even in his comments on the 'wounded civilization' of India and the 'overcrowded barracoon' of Mauritius. Black West Indians are largely missing from Naipaul's early fiction and when they do appear, in the form of characters like the black M.L.C. whose monocle falls in his soup at the Governor's dinner in *The Mystic Masseur* (1957) or Miss Blackie, the Tulsis' faithful retainer in *A House for Mr Birnas* (1961), they are usually caricatured. In his more recent novels black characters figure more prominently, but are generally held at arm's length. In the title-story of *In a Free State* (1971) Africans are repeatedly referred to as inhabitants of the primeval forest and are never individualized; they remain Conradian ciphers (though the novella lacks the symbolic intensity of the Pole's two Congo stories), something which Naipaul implicitly acknowledges through an allusion to *Heart of Darkness*¹ and by calling them 'emblematic'² at one point. In *Guerrillas* (1975) his black West Indians are mostly hopelessly lost slum boys who live off self-destructive fantasies. In *A Bend in the River* (1979) his Africans are slightly more sympathetic, but again they remain peripheral as he evinces more interest in the predicament of his East African Asian and European characters.

In Naipaul's non-fiction the picture is worse still. Here, one senses, the gloves are off and he is making little attempt to conceal his deeper feelings through the dramatic strategies which lend an aura of imperson-

ality to his fictions. Most notoriously, in *The Middle Passage* (1962), a work which John Hearn has argued demonstrates its author's negro-phobia,⁴ he has lampooned both Caribbean blacks and Indians by saying that their aspirations towards whiteness make them 'like monkeys pleading for evolution',⁵ but while the Indians are allowed to derive strength through their alienness, he sees the black man's development as stultified by his 'desire to assert himself'.⁶ More recently, in 'A New King for the Congo', he has written of the resentments of a new generation of educated Zairis as 'a wish to wipe out and undo, an African nihilism, the rage of primitive men coming to themselves and finding that they have been fooled and affronted'⁷ and, in a 1979 interview, has expressed the belief that 'Africa has no future'.⁸

In marked contrast, Naipaul's first book⁹ *Miguel Street* (1959), a collection of interlocking short stories about the residents of a street in one of the poorer parts of Port of Spain¹⁰ appears to show genuine concern for the ordinary West Indian. Here the black man is not excluded from the centre of the stage, nor is he allowed only a cipher-like existence. The life of Trinidad's urban black population is portrayed from the inside and with a fair degree of sympathy. Moreover, *Miguel Street* is unique in Naipaul's fiction in that it immerses itself in the culture of the black West Indian. Throughout the work Naipaul employs allusions to calypsoes, particularly of the 1930s and 1940s, which are directly related to the collection's central themes and help to lend unity to what may initially appear to be no more than a number of very loosely related accounts of the lives of the street's inhabitants.

In *The Middle Passage* Naipaul comments on the importance of calypso to the Trinidadian:

It is only in the calypso that the Trinidadian touches reality. The calypso is a purely local form. No song composed outside Trinidad is a calypso. The calypso deals with local incidents, local attitudes, and it does so in a local language. The pure calypso, the best calypso, is incomprehensible to the outsider.¹¹

The same attitude is engrained in *Miguel Street* where no less than ten calypsoes are quoted. In two instances, the stories 'Love, Love, Love Alone' and 'Until the Soldiers Came', the debt is acknowledged in titles which are drawn from the lyrics of particular calypsoes. Elsewhere the allusions, sometimes the prerogative of the narrator and sometimes voiced by characters within the stories, function as incidental counterpoint to situations being described. Usually the effect of such allusions is ironic, as when Eddoes's girlfriend delivers to him the baby whose father he is supposed to be and Boyce whistles the calypso:

Chinese Children calling me Daddy!
 I black like jet,
 My wife like tar-baby.
 And still —
 Chinese children Calling me Daddy!
 Oh God, somebody pouring milk in my coffee. (p. 127)¹²

Most of the calypso allusions are of this order and provide ironic comment on aspects of the society, especially the man-woman relationship. Indeed Naipaul's portrayal of the world of Miguel Street at times comes very close to the calypsonian's own often extremely ironic view of the society. Ultimately, however, he goes beyond the macho ethic implicit in most calypsonians' treatment of the battle of the sexes and subtly reveals what he sees as the reality underlying such attitudes.

In addition to actually quoting ten calypsos in the text, Naipaul also appears to be alluding to others in a more oblique fashion. His account of Man-man's crucifixion is a retelling of the third stanza of The Mighty Wonder's 'Follow Me Children'.¹³ Bolo's nickname 'Missing Ball', given to him because of his endeavours to win the *Trinidad Guardian's* Missing Ball competition, echoes the title of a calypso drama of the period which originally appeared as 'No Money, No Love' in August 1989 and was revised in the calypso season of the following year with the title 'The Missing Ball'.¹⁴ The relationship of Toni and Mrs Christiani in 'Love, Love, Love Alone' is based on the philosophy advocated in the calypso 'Knock Them Down', which is quoted in 'The Maternal Instinct':

Every now and then just knock them down.
 Every now and then just throw them down.
 Black up their eye and bruise up their knee
 And then they love you eternally. (p. 111)¹⁵

So the calypso tradition furnishes the most significant body of allusions in *Miguel Street* and Naipaul's use of such allusions has the effect of firmly rooting the work within the experience of Trinidad's urban black populace.

Numerous commentators have, like Naipaul, pointed out the social significance of calypso as — along with steelband — the music of the Trinidad masses. Among them is Naipaul's younger brother Shiva:

Trinidad did offer something. It offered the calypso and the steelband. Here were two indisputably original creations rooted to begin with among the urban Negro poor. Purely of the island, they did not need to refer to anything beyond it. Therefore, they were rejected and looked upon with suspicion and hostility by the

educated and well-to-do; the steelband and calypso did not have the sanction of the metropolitan culture. Lacking a theatre and a literature, it was the calypso, cutting through the fantasy, which mirrored Trinidadian life and without whose intervention much would have gone unrecorded and unnoticed. The calypsonian, himself a man of the people, chronicled the life of the people. He did so frankly and unsentimentally; and at times he could be brutal.¹⁸

Though these comments, like the whole of the paper from which they are taken — and indeed much of Shiva's other work — smack rather too strongly of the influence of his older brother, they do at least have the virtue of placing calypso in relation to the metropolitan culture and in *Miguel Street* Vidia Naipaul is dramatizing essentially the same relationship.

Moreover, Shiva's comments on the calypsonian's role as the 'man of the people' who chronicles the society in all its aspects also give just the right emphasis. The origins of the music are almost certainly primarily African — the name itself, originally 'kaiso', has been traced to a West African source¹⁹ — and Errol Hill argues that the calypsonian is a descendant of the *griots* of the Mandingo people of West Africa.²⁰ It is an illuminating comparison, for the *griots* were the repository of the oral history of their nation and its arts, while in Trinidad virtually every significant public event in the post-Emancipation period has been mentioned in 'kaiso'. Even today, despite its popularity and consequent bastardization in America in the years after World War II and despite the claims of reggae and black American music to reflect the mood of the younger generation more adequately, calypso remains the most vibrant medium of social criticism in Trinidad.²¹

As an art form of the people calypso, then, represents an opposite pole to the metropolitan culture and, on one level, *Miguel Street* explores this cultural divide. It is most clearly illustrated in the story 'B. Wordsworth' in which the protagonist sees himself as a spiritual brother of his English namesake:

'What your name, mister?'

'B. Wordsworth.'

'B. for Bill?'

'Black. Black Wordsworth. White Wordsworth was my brother. We share one heart. I can watch a small flower like the morning glory and cry.' (pp. 57-8)

However, B. Wordsworth's image of himself as a Trinidadian Wordsworth represents only half the truth about him. He attempts to sell his poems, a practice in which, the narrator tells him, only calypsonians

engage, and it transpires that he is in fact a part-time calypsonian during the season. Like the vast majority of the two to three hundred aspirants who annually compete for the title of Calypso Monarch, he finds it impossible to make a living from singing calypsos during the rest of the year and so dispenses with this role and dons that of Romantic poet. Both roles, Naipaul implies, are variants on the same idea; both fail to bring him any real self-fulfilment.

B. Wordsworth is, however, less a victim of his metropolitan fantasy than are certain other characters in the street. Those who aspire to the chimera of a metropolitan goal are invariably disappointed. In 'His Chosen Calling' Elias sits the Cambridge School Certificate exam on three occasions with scant success and the narrator comments, 'We felt it wasn't fair, making a boy like Elias do litritcher and poultry' (p. 41). The attempt of Titus Hoyt, 'I.A.', a kind of adult equivalent of Elias, to bring 'litritcher and poultry' to the boys of the street by forming the Miguel Street Literary and Social Youth Club proves equally abortive. His Latin lessons give the boys the feeling that 'one man sit down one day and make all this up and have everybody else learning it' (p. 99). The most extreme metropolitan fantasy is acted out by Man-man, who assumes the role of hell-fire preacher and shows himself to have a Christ complex when he stages his own crucifixion and is consequently eventually committed to a lunatic asylum.

Like B. Wordsworth, Elias and Titus Hoyt, Man-man is a casualty of the society in which, as Naipaul sees it, success is a virtual impossibility. In *The Middle Passage* he writes:

We lived in a society which denied itself heroes.

It was a place where the stories were never stories of success but of failure: brilliant men, scholarship winners, who had died young, gone mad, or taken to drink; cricketers of promise whose careers had been ruined by disagreement with the authorities.¹⁰

Ultimately, despite their surface resilience, virtually all the characters in *Miguel Street* seem paralysed by their environment. Certainly all who aspire to any kind of metropolitan ideal are doomed to disappointment. Naipaul does, however, suggest the possibility of alternative positives, indigenous to the society, through the medium of his calypso allusions.

Commenting on the function of the calypso allusions in *Miguel Street*, Gordon Rohlehr says:

In *Miguel Street*, the spirit and gaiety of the calypso are not considered with hope as a new and strange positive which the masses of Trinidad have constructed out of the

debris of their lives, but with a sense of pathos as a sign of the pathological insensitivity of the Trinidad people. I would like to suggest that both views are possible, and that the first seems both the more charitable and the more correct one.²¹

Elsewhere, in a more general discussion of Trinidadian wit, which finds its most characteristic expression in calypso, Rohlehr suggests that it may be viewed in two completely different lights, which are analogous to these two views of calypso:

Wit is often a mask behind which the individual hides the fact that he has no face at all. It can be a means of evading truth about self and milieu. ... a wry expression of paralysis. On the other hand, it is equally a means of confronting truth, something more than simple pose. When the calypsonian sings about painful truth, he generally has to pose as posing...²²

On the surface, the wit of the inhabitants of Miguel Street seems to be 'a wry expression of paralysis'. All the characters, including the central figure Fat, have constructed personae which have enabled them to confront the world, but which involve 'evading truth about self'. Nevertheless it is possible to find in *Miguel Street*, as Rohlehr has argued in another context, 'an implicit recognition of the positives'²³ of the calypsonian world. Naipaul's rendition of the lives of ordinary urban Trinidadians is sufficiently thorough and (thanks to the use of the boy narrator) his point of view is sufficiently neutral to enable one to see beyond the 'sense of pathos'. Although he repeatedly strips away the masks which his characters wear, he is less concerned to expose their shortcomings satirically than to smile wryly at the futility of their endeavours and so compassion is not precluded. His use of calypso allusions and themes is an index of the extent to which he has immersed himself in the lives of ordinary urban Trinidadians, even if he begins from a position which suggests the comic ridiculousness of such people.

Specific calypso allusions both reflect the way in which the music provides commentary on actual happenings, such as the burning of the Port of Spain Treasury in 1983,²⁴ and cast light on the male-female relationship in the society. The battle of the sexes has been the most important subject of the calypsos of the last forty years and it is central in *Miguel Street*. The further one reads, the clearer it becomes that, far from being a collection of only loosely related stories, Naipaul's first book is a carefully orchestrated investigation of the concept of manliness as it obtains in Trinidad.

The pattern is set in the very first story, in which 'Bogart' models himself on the American film star whose name he has adopted. The

Bogart persona was enormously popular in Trinidad in the 1940s²⁰ and in *The Middle Passage* Naipaul comments on the particular nature of his appeal:

In its stars the Trinidadian audience looks for a special quality of style. John Garfield had this style; so did Bogart. When Bogart, without turning, coolly rebuked a pawing Lauren Bacall, 'You're breathing down mah neck', Trinidad adopted him as its own. 'That is man' ... For the Trinidadian an actor has style when he is seen to fulfill certain aspirations of the audience: the virility of Bogart, the man-on-the-run romanticism of Garfield, the pimpishness and menace of Durya, the ice-cold sadism of Widmark.²¹

The Bogart of Naipaul's story appears to be a strong, silent man who has no need of women or family and so it comes as something of a surprise when he is finally revealed to be a bigamist. The story ends with Eddoes asking Hat, who has a choric role in the work as well as being an important character in his own right, why Bogart has left his second wife and come back to the street. 'To be a man, among we men' (p. 16) is Hat's reply.

'To be a man, among we men' — the ideal of manliness is as central to *Miguel Street* as it is to the calypso tradition. In the second story, 'The Thing Without a Name', the formula of 'Bogart' is reversed: Bogart runs away from his wives; Popo, the carpenter hero of this story, runs to his wife. Popo finds that he has never been so popular in the street as he is when his wife, Emelda, deserts him. Previously his manhood has been questioned and Hat has said: 'Popo is a man-woman. Not a proper man' (p. 19). Now, however, as he begins to drink heavily and wants to assault everyone, Hat is forced to admit 'He is a man, like any of we' (p. 21). The reality of the situation is, of course, that Popo's drinking and belligerency are masks for his loneliness and it is not long before he leaves the street to win Emelda back. This leads to his becoming the subject of a popular calypso,²² but on his return to Miguel Street, he finds that he is no longer respected for his manliness since he has shown his dependence on woman and he becomes a peg for Hat to hang his anti-feminist remarks on. The story's final twist, however, reinstates Popo as 'one of the boys' (p. 25). He steals furniture and paint to improve his home for Emelda, is caught and sent to jail. Jail, like heavy drinking, automatically establishes one's manliness in the street's eyes and so, when he is released, he is able to retain both Emelda and the respect of the street's men. Nevertheless there is still a sense of loss in the story, since, as the narrator is saddened to discover, the poetic side of Popo's nature, repre-

sented by his work on 'the thing without a name', has been suppressed and has given way to more routine carpentry.

The theme of manliness recurs throughout the volume, appearing in one form or another in no less than twelve of the seventeen stories. As in calypso until quite recently, the treatment of the man-woman relationship is focussed almost exclusively on the male viewpoint. Although, as Merle Hodge has pointed out,²⁰ *Miguel Street* contains several portraits of strong women, women are, with the exception of Laura in 'The Maternal Instinct' and the outsider Mrs Christiani in 'Love, Love, Love Alone' assigned secondary roles. As in most calypsoes, woman is the passive backcloth against which male aspirations are played out.

The bulk of calypsoes on the man-woman relationship are anti-feminist.²¹ Initially *Miguel Street* may appear to be similarly hostile to women. Naipaul quotes two classic anti-feminist calypsoes, 'Knock Them Down' and 'Man Santapee':²² 'Man centipede bad./ Woman centipede more than bad' (p. 126), and the whole work is pervaded by similar sentiments, especially as voiced by Hat. Moreover, certain incidents, such as Mrs Bhaku's cleaning and oiling the cricket-bat with which her husband beats her and Mrs Christiani's masochistic obsession with Toni, suggest woman's complicity in the macho ethic preached in calypsoes like 'Knock Them Down'.

Nevertheless the dominant pattern of the stories is centred on an ironic exposure of the pretence of manliness. Big Foot, the terror of the street, is revealed to be a coward. Nathaniel's apparent espousal of the philosophy of 'Knock Them Down', which he quotes, shocks even the other male chauvinists of *Miguel Street*, but proves, as Hat anticipates, to be pure sham. The reality of the situation is that he is receiving not giving beatings and, when this is discovered, Eddoes remarks, 'It look like they make up that calypso about men, not womens' (p. 112). Morgan, who has ten children and prides himself on his virility, is broken by the exposure of his pretence of manliness when his wife returns home to find him in bed with another woman and makes him a laughing-stock by taunting him with his pride in his virility:

'Leave the light on. Come, let we show the big hero to the people in the street. Come, let we show them what man really make like. You is not a anti-man. you is real man. You ain't only make ten children with me, you going to make more with somebody else.' (p. 89)

and holding him up by the waist for all the people in the street to see his puny near-naked body. George, a noted wife-beater, buries one wife,

drives away another and, in an anticipation of the title-story of *A Flag on the Island* (1967), turns to running a brothel for American soldiers. Finally, however, his macho pose is insufficient to sustain him and he dies another broken man. In each case the assumed persona of manliness fails to conceal the underlying insecurity of those who adopt it.²¹ Like those who base their life-styles on metropolitan fantasies, those who affect to be strong men with no need of women are destroyed by their failure to fulfil what proves to be an impossible role.

The story 'Love, Love, Love Alone', which takes its title from one of the most famous of pre-war calypsos, a calypso on the subject of Edward VIII's abdication:²² 'Is love, love, love alone/ That cause King Edward to leave the throne' (p. 136) affords a significant contrast to the majority of the stories in *Miguel Street*. The story of the Portuguese Mrs Christiani (known in Miguel Street as Mrs Hercira) parallels King Edward's abdication in that she has left her husband and the comforts of her middle-class life and come to live in the street with her lover, Toni. To the narrator's mother such behaviour is 'white people business' (p. 136) and she provides an interesting Hindu reaction to the European notion of Romantic love when she tells Mrs Christiani:

I really wish you was like me. If somebody did marry you off when you was fifteen, we wouldn'ta been hearing all this nonsense, you hear. Making all this damn fuss about your heart and love and all that rubbish.' (p. 144)

Yet, even here, the reality of the situation reverses expectations. Mrs Christiani's love is inextricably bound up with Toni's brutal treatment of her and has a definite basis in masochism. So again the calypso allusion is ironic: her love is, as the narrator's mother points out, a far cry from the 'great love' (p. 136) of King Edward. Ultimately Toni's brutality becomes intolerable to her and she retreats to the security of her middle class world. As with B. Wordsworth's account of his lost love, the dénouement of the story suggests the impossibility of European Romantic love in the calypso society. Paradoxically 'Love, Love, Love Alone' is the one story in *Miguel Street* in which the woman is really a victim of the macho pose.

In virtually every other relationship which is described it becomes clear that the real strength lies with the woman. The most resilient person in the street is Laura in 'The Maternal Instinct', who has eight children by seven fathers and treats Nathaniel, her man of the moment, with abject scorn: 'You think you is a man. But don't try playing with me, you hear. Yes, Nathaniel, is you I talking to with your bottom like two stale bread in your pants' (p. 113). Finally Laura's fate is not unlike that of most of

the male protagonists; her spirit is also broken. This, however, is something which is beyond the power of any man to achieve. It is her daughter Lorna's becoming pregnant and, as it were, usurping her role which transforms Laura into an old woman almost overnight. 'The Maternal Instinct' serves to bring out what is latent throughout *Miguel Street*: the society is fundamentally matriarchal. Hence the male's need to assert his threatened manhood in aggressive macho postures.

This pattern comes to a climax in the last three stories. In the fifteenth story, 'Until the Soldiers Came', the central theme appears to be the disruption caused by the American military presence in Trinidad in World War II and, a specific reflection of this, the Americanization of Hat's brother, Edward. Naipaul includes three references to calypsos by Lord Invader which illustrate how the power of the 'Yankee dollar' disturbed the traditional pattern of man-woman relationships in Trinidad. This is one of the main themes of the calypsos of the early 1940s and it achieved classic expression in Invader's 'Rum and Coca-Cola', one of the calypsos which is quoted in the text.²³ So, in portraying the influence of America on the social life of Trinidad, both here and in 'Bogart' and 'George and the Pink House', Naipaul is once again placing his stories within the mainstream of the calypso experience.

The portrayal of the 'rum and coca-cola encounter' in 'Before the Soldiers Came' provides a variation of the manhood theme. Like Bogart, Edward adopts the mannerisms of a Hollywood film actor and, as is also the case with Bogart, his assumption of the persona of a 'tough guy' is an attempt to conceal his fundamental insecurity. Edward marries a 'modern' white wife, claiming that he has to do so because he has made her pregnant, though this is not really so. When the marriage proves childless and his virility is consequently impugned, the street's reaction destroys Edward, who has become a victim not only of the 'tough guy' persona, but also of the white man's notion of love. The final straw comes when his wife leaves him for an American and he finds himself a living exemplification of the calypso by Invader to which Naipaul alludes in the title of the story: '>I was living with my decent and contented wife/ Until the soldiers came and broke up my life' (pp. 185 and 196).²⁴ Thoroughly disgraced, Edward leaves Miguel Street and emigrates. Subsequently the news filters through that his wife has had a baby by her American. Fortunately Edward is far away. It is the ultimate affront to manhood.

In the next story Hat, who has figured in most of the previous pieces, now becomes the centre of attention. Hitherto his role has been mainly choric and, although his comments have not been unfailingly correct, he

has repeatedly shown himself able to see through the masks assumed by others: 'I always feel he (Morgan) overdoing everything. I always feel the man lying about everything. I feel that he even lying to himself' (p. 83) and to accept life's vicissitudes with stoicism: 'Life is helluva thing. You can see trouble coming and you can't do a damn thing to prevent it coming. You just got to sit and watch and wait' (p. 116). To the fatherless boy-narrator, Hat is very much a surrogate father figure. His is the voice of experience which frequently acts as a foil to the boy's ingenuous reaction to events. Of all the male residents of Miguel Street he has appeared, thus far, to be the best equipped to lead an integrated life in the calypso society.

Now in the story which bears Hat's name, the narrator endorses such a view of his character:

I never knew a man who enjoyed life as much as Hat did. (p. 202)

He was self-sufficient, and I didn't believe he even needed women. I knew, of course, that he visited certain places in the city from time to time, but I thought he did this more for the vicious thrill than for the women. (p. 207)

In short, Hat would seem really to be the kind of man that the other characters aspire to be. This, however, is not the case. The story reveals him to be as much a victim of an assumed persona of manliness as any of the street's men. It repeats the formula of the ironic exposure of pretence which Naipaul has already worked successfully in the majority of the previous stories, only now there is a far greater sense of pathos, since, when we come to read Hat's story, he is familiar to us as no previous character has been. Our knowledge of him, coupled with the narrator's obvious warmth of feeling for him, serve to make this the most poignant story in the collection.

The story begins with an account of Hat's taking twelve boys to an inter-island cricket match. At the ground Hat tells onlookers that all twelve boys are his own and gets soft drinks at a discount price as a result. He thus successfully combines the pose of virility with the attributes of the trickster, a figure whom Naipaul sees as having taken over the role of the hero in the calypso society.³⁸ He appears to be perfectly attuned to Trinidadian life and his response to cricket, arguably another important positive in the society,³⁹ is an education for the narrator on this occasion:

Hat taught me many things that afternoon. From the way he pronounced them, I learned about the 'beauty of cricketers' names, and he gave me all his own excitement at watching a cricket match. (p. 201)

Although his trickery occasionally leads him into trouble with the police, Hat's spirits are never dampened for long. In the narrator's eyes, he leads an idyllic existence free from the entanglements with women which seem to complicate the lives of most of the street's men:

Cricket, football, horse-racing; read the paper in the mornings and afternoons; sit on the pavement and talk; get nobly drunk on Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve. He didn't appear to need anything else. (p. 207)

But finally Hat too proves far from self-sufficient. After his brother Edward's flight, he is never quite the same. His visits to the Port of Spain brothels become more frequent and culminate in his bringing a woman, Dolly, home to live with him. On the surface he changes little, but his nephews who live with him tell of a different Hat indoors, of a man who even buys 'joolry' (p. 210) for Dolly. From the outside the narrator notes that his wild birds, previously allowed to wander freely through his house and peck at visitors, are now caged and his tame alsatian is chained. Both changes are metaphors of Hat's having surrendered his free spirit as a result of having brought Dolly into his life. The sequel is predictable. Like a calypso archetype of the perfidious woman:

Marilda, Marilda,
Marilda, you thief my money
And gone Venezuela. (p. 210)¹⁷

Dolly deserts Hat for another man. He pursues her, nearly kills her and is sent to jail for four years. The severity of the sentence seems at least partly due to the irrelevant defence which his Indian lawyer, Chittaranjan,¹⁸ conducts for him. Chittaranjan argues, with recourse to clichéd Shakespearean allusions, that Hat should be dealt with leniently because he has committed a '*crime passionel*' (pp. 211-2). It is, Naipaul implies, the kind of defence that does more harm than good in the calypso society.

When Hat emerges from prison three years later, much of his former vivacity is gone. The narrator is now eighteen and, as Hat puts it, a 'big man' (p. 213) himself and it is impossible for them to enjoy the same relationship as before. During the period that Hat has been away, the narrator has matured to a point where he is able to see through the personae of the men of Miguel Street and when Hat says to him that a long time has elapsed since they were last together, he reflects:

A long time. But it was just three years, three years in which I had grown up and looked critically at the people around me. I no longer wanted to be like Eddoes. He was so weak and thin, and I hadn't realised that he was so small. Titus Hoyt was stupid and boring, and not funny at all. Everything had changed.

When Hat went to jail, part of me had died. (pp. 213-4)

Although the narrator is now able to see the reality underlying the surface gaiety of Miguel Street life, he is not insulated against succumbing to the street's conception of manliness himself. The final story shows him turning to drinking and womanizing, largely it would seem because he feels that society fails to offer any real alternatives. When his mother attacks him for his dissoluteness, he replies: 'Is not my fault really. Is just Trinidad. What else anybody can do here except drink?' (p. 216). Society emerges as the villain which renders the individual powerless to achieve lasting self-fulfilment. Finally, the narrator is saved by being sent abroad for a metropolitan education. He succeeds where Elias has failed and ultimately this kind of escape seems to be the only possible road to success for those born in the land of the calypso.

So, although in *Miguel Street* one finds Naipaul coming closer to a compassionate treatment of the black West Indian's situation than in any of his subsequent works, even here there is more than a touch of ironic ambivalence as he exposes the reality underlying the calypsonian's humorous treatment of the battle of the sexes. Even though he immerses himself in this aspect of the folk culture of the urban West Indian, finally the positives of the calypso society are rejected as the narrator grows up and takes a far less tolerant view of his world in the final story, before, like so many of Naipaul's other heroes, taking flight at the end of the work.

NOTES

1. 'Dan is the Man in the Van' is available on *Sparrow at the Sheraton*, la records, Trinidad, unnumbered.
2. *In a Free State* (London, 1971), p. 170.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 147.
4. *Caribbean Quarterly*, 8, 4 (December 1962), 65-6.
5. *The Middle Passage* (Harmondsworth, 1969), p. 87. Subsequent references are to this edition.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 89.
7. *The Return of Eva Perón with The Killings in Trinidad* (London, 1980), p. 136.
8. 'Meeting V.S. Naipaul', Naipaul interviewed by Elizabeth Hardwick, *The New York Times Book Review*, 13 May 1979, p. 36.

9. Though *The Mystic Masseur* (1957) and *The Suffrage of El Shira* (1958) were published before *Miguel Street*, it was written earlier: Naipaul began it in 1955.
10. Not, as some commentators have suggested, a slum-street. References in the work make it clear that Miguel Street is located in the Woodbrook/St James area on the West side of Port of Spain. Although not residential, this area is far from being a slum. This is made evident in 'The Maternal Instinct' where the street's residents look down on Nathaniel who comes from the 'dirtier' east end of Port of Spain (*Miguel Street*, London, 1969, p. 110). Subsequent references are to this edition and are included in the text.
11. *The Middle Passage*, pp. 75-6.
12. 'Chinese Children Calling Me Daddy' was composed and sung by The Tiny Terror (also known as The Terror) and is available on the album *Calypso Chronicle*, Vol. 1, Request Records, No SLP 731. For help in tracing this and some of the other calypsoes referred to in *Miguel Street*, I am indebted to Gordon Rohlehr.
13. Quoted by Landeg White, *F.S. Naipaul: A Critical Introduction* (London, 1975), p. 50.
14. Errol Hill, *The Trinidad Carnival: Mandate for a National Theatre* (Austin and London, 1972), p. 89. The calypso-drama tells the story of an impecunious husband who regains the affections of his errant wife after winning a newspaper's Missing Ball Competition.
15. Best known today as 'Cuff Them Down' by The Mighty Sparrow (Singer Francisco), this calypso has become traditional. The Roaring Lion (Hubert De Leon) and Lord Beginner (Egbert Moore) both claim to have composed it.
16. 'The Writer Without a Society', *Common Wealth*, edited by Anna Rutherford (Aarhus, 1972), p. 116.
17. To the Hausa word 'kaito' by Atila the Hun (Raymond Quevedo) in an unpublished article quoted in Hill, *The Trinidad Carnival*, p. 61.
18. 'Calypso', *Jamaica Journal*, 5,1 (March 1971), 25.
19. During the last decade calypsoians have fallen into two main camps: those who believe that calypso should incorporate elements from other black music and sing 'Soca' (soul + calypso) and those who believe that it should remain pure. The conflict is dramatized by The Mighty Chalkdust (Hollis Liverpool) in his composition 'Calypso vs. Soca', Straker's Records, No GS 2224. The success of Chalkdust (*Calypso Monarch* in 1976 and 1977) and Lord Belator (*Calypso Monarch* in 1980), both social commentators who eschew outside influences, suggests that the traditional calypso is more than holding its own.
20. *The Middle Passage*, pp. 43-4.
21. 'Sparrow and the Language of Calypso', *Sonocou*, 2 (September 1970), 87.
22. 'Kaiso '69', *Moko*, 8 (14 February 1969), 1.
23. 'The Ironic Approach', *The Islands in Between*, edited by Louis James (London, 1968), p. 159.
24. 'The Treasury Fire' was one of the calypsoes sung by Lord Beginner during the 1935 Carnival season, *Trinidad Guardian*, 15 January 1935, p. 1. The fire itself occurred on 25 June 1932.
25. Bogart's popularity in Trinidad is well authenticated in the newspaper reports of the period. A review of *To Have and Have Not*, which ran simultaneously at two Port of Spain cinemas in 1945, speaks of the 'strange attraction' which he had for local audiences, *Trinidad Guardian*, 4 March 1945, Magazine Section, p. 3.
26. *The Middle Passage*, pp. 63-4.

27. I have not succeeded in tracing this calypso and feel that it is probably an invention on Naipaul's part.
28. 'The Shadow of the Whip', *Is Massa Day Dead?*, edited by Orde Coombe (New York, 1974), p. 116.
29. See J.D. Elder, 'The Male/Female Conflict in Calypso', *Caribbean Quarterly*, XIV, 3 (September 1968), 23-40.
30. Composed and sung by Atilla the Hun. The chorus has the same tune as 'Knock Them Down'.
31. Cf. Naipaul's remarks on Argentinian machismo in *The Return of Elia Perón with The Killings in Trinidad*, pp. 155-6.
32. Composed and sung by Lord Carriser (Rupert Callender). Available as 'Edward VIII' on the album *The Real Calypso*, Folkways Records, No RBF 13.
33. Lord Invader (Rupert Grant) sang many songs on the effect of the American 'invasion'. A typical example, 'Yankee Dollar' is included on *The Real Calypso*.
34. I have not succeeded in tracing this particular calypso. The theme was commonplace and 'My Wife Left Me for a Yankee' by Lord Kitchener (Aldwin Roberts) is one of its best examples. Cf. also 'Yankee Dollar'.
35. See Naipaul's comments on the 'picaroon' society, *The Middle Passage*, pp. 78-9.
36. See Naipaul's remarks in 'Crickets', *The Overcrowded Barracoon and other articles* (London, 1972), pp. 18-19.
37. 'Machilda' by Lionel Belasco was popularized by Harry Belafonte, who first recorded it in April 1953. It is included on his album *Belafonte*, RCA Victor Records, No LPM 1150.
38. Brother of Chinamanjan, the goldsmith in *The Suffrage of Elchira*.

Experience as Drama in the Works of V.S. Naipaul

Once while sitting with other tourists in a government rest-house in the Egyptian desert, V.S. Naipaul witnessed a scene in which some Italians dropped food near their tables to entice local children to come within striking range of an attendant's whip — a cruel game staged so that the Italians could take snapshots. Impulsively, the enraged Naipaul sprang from his chair, grabbed the whip, and threatened to report the incident to the authorities. Ended at this point, the anecdote might exemplify the triumph of honest emotion over callousness. However, as Naipaul's account of the incident suggests, the show continued. Under the cool, appraising stare of the Italians, Naipaul himself became the self-conscious star of an unrehearsed mini-melodrama — a role in which he felt 'exposed, futile'.¹

This story is, I think, indicative of Naipaul's tendency to describe various aspects of human behaviour, particularly that of Third World societies, in terms associated with drama, including film. Although not unaware of the positive qualities of dramatic action, Naipaul is inclined to view it more or less satirically. What one critic implies is an important feature of Naipaul's novel *The Mimic Men*, enforced roles producing an atmosphere of unreality and powerlessness, is applicable to much of Naipaul's work.²

In *Mr Stone and the Knights Companion* Naipaul satirizes the urge to inflate experience into theatre. A junior executive Mephistopheles to Mr Stone's reluctant Faust, Whympster has no patience with the plodding humanitarianism of the elder man's proposal: 'A rescue here and a rescue there is all very well', Whympster sighs, 'but in a few months even that will become routine. Everyone will become bored, even the Knights. We want something big. Something explosive.'³ More than an escape from routine, drama is a means of coping with a generalized anxiety that an ordered reality is in danger of violation, even engulfment, by the

forces of disorder — a feeling implicit in various characters' fear of housebreakers, the xenophobic outbursts of the British National Party, and the interest expressed in the films *Riffifi*, with its vault break-in, and *A Night to Remember*, about the Titanic disaster (pp. 13, 22, 27, 32, 36–37). In the same way that Mr Stone's self-dramatizing anecdote about his flight from a trespassing tom is an attempt to control his private fear of cats, the origin of the pensioners' aid scheme that so quickly expands into a stagey crusade is Stone's primitive terror at the real or imagined disappearance of a man into a smokey nothingness (pp. 16–17, 63).

In the title story of *Free State* Naipaul, like Conrad before him, holds up to view the posturings of the European in an alien environment.⁴ The whites' barely suppressed anxiety at the mounting hostility of a surrounding and potentially inundating black Africa turns isolated outposts of colonialism into stages for the performances of die-hard *bwanas*, such as the stoically stiff-lipped 'colonel' — his hotel and its environs 'dissolving in mist' like a 'Bergman' setting — muttering a carefully timed and theatrically fatalistic 'exit line' (pp. 174, 194).

However, role-playing can be destructive. The liberal ideals that nourished the quixotic imaginations of various European adventurer-revolutionaries who attempted to create utopias in the West Indies of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries became scenarios for a theatre of annihilation: 'borrowed words that never matched the society, the private theatre of disguises and false names that ended in blood and ... heads spiked in public places'.⁵ If in *Guerrillas* Jane's attempt to play the part of Third-World activist under the left wing of Peter Roche, another player of roles, results in her murder,⁶ Gale Benson, the white English-woman on whom the fictional Jane is partly based, died at the hands of the very men (pseudo-Black Power revolutionaries themselves) she expected to be an appreciative audience for her performance as a black African slave girl.⁷

In *El Dorado* Naipaul views the early history of Trinidad as a series of dramatic, almost operatic, *moments* separated by lengthy *entr'actes* of inactivity. The event that sparked into existence the British Empire in the American tropics, the landing of an English force on Trinidad in the seventeenth century, was in effect the creation of a theatre — a 'blank space' transformed into a 'drama' (p. 32). In the twentieth-century world of the Caribbean archipelago — the Lilliputian islands with their simple socio-political organization — the self-assertive politician finds just the right stage for a one-man performance, a 'drama of the folk-leader'.⁸

Strongly motivating the West Indian's self-dramatizing behaviour is

the need to escape, at least in imagination, from a daily life offering little in the way of excitement or dignity.] A comic Emma Bovary whose romantic dreams languish beneath the dead weight of the provincial and the humdrum, Mr Biswas makes himself the central character in a series of short stories (all of which seem to be entitled 'Escape') extending to but not beyond the point where the family-burdened hero meets a beautiful and conveniently barren girl. And understandably, in view of his dubious distinction of being dubbed the Tuls family entertainer in residence, Biswas seizes on a promotional campaign for a Port-of-Spain newspaper to assume the role of a Trinidadian 'Scarlet Pimpernel'.⁸

Not infrequently the West Indian may have roles imposed on him. Looking back on his life in terms of his relationship with whites, Ralph Singh realizes that he has been a 'performer' in a cruel 'child's game', his 'every action done at the command of his tormentor'. This game is designed to reinforce a colonial mentality, a sense of inferiority and dependence, even when the 'tormentor' seems most favourably disposed to him, as is shown by Singh's brief, humiliating sexual affair with Lady Stella right after the equally humbling failure of his political mission to the British Government. In forcing upon Singh her copy of the *Oxford Nursery Rhyme Book* (its verse she considers 'frightfully sexual'), Stella is reducing him to two popular stereotypes, the West Indian as the sexual athlete of the whites' erotic fantasies and the dependent child of the parental country. The falseness of any relationship based on such game-playing becomes obvious when Singh's inability to live up to the sexual stereotype reveals the woman's selfish anger and lack of any genuine interest in him as a human being.⁹

Naipaul once described the Caribbean small islanders' feeling of unimportance in this way: 'To be in Trinidad was to be nowhere.... We expected no one to have heard of us and were surprised and grateful when someone had.'¹⁰ One lesson to be learned from the career of Naipaul's character Blackwhite (or H.J. B. White), the writer of sentimental English countryhouse romances and embittered black American protest novels but not of realistic fiction about his own island society, is that 'we turn experience continually into stories to lend drama to dullness, to maintain our self-respect'.¹¹ In *Mimic Men* we are told that the need to bestow names on objects and locations in the otherwise 'drab landscape' of one's home island confers at least an apparent validity on the public activities of the West Indian leader troubled by doubts as to the importance of this place and, by extension, his political life. 'There was drama in that naming', notes Ralph Singh, and he admits that

however futile the leaders, they could enjoy for a while the heady experience of being the 'chief actors' in their society (pp. 256-7).¹³

The same belief held by the Colonial Office that the motion picture camera will confer on the election in the backwater village of Elvira a validity, even a reality, it would not otherwise possess, as though to be is to be filmed,¹⁴ may cause the immediate reaction of Ralph Singh, the mimic man, to the sight of his English wife's boarding of a plane for a permanent separation: he pictures himself as Humphrey Bogart watching Ingrid Bergman's departure at the end of *Casablanca* (p. 219). The card-playing 'Patience' re-names himself 'Bogart' to dispel chronic tedium,¹⁵ and in the title story of *Flag*, Selma, a typical small islander in being constantly on the prowl for an identity in a society without one of its own, fancies herself as Norma Shearer in the 1940 film *Escape* (pp. 178, 229). The heightened sense of existence these characters feel they are gaining from the American silver screen exemplifies what, according to Naipaul, is a characteristic of modern Trinidad: for decades eagerly feeding on 'every stock situation of the American cinema', the Trinidadian has become addicted to the 'Hollywood formula' and as early as the nineteen-fifties he was 'remaking' himself 'in the image of the Hollywood B-man'.¹⁶

'Flag' suggests that television is having much the same impact on the West Indies. In this 'Fantasy for a Small Screen', as it is subtitled, the transformation of an ex-British colony into the small-screen embodiment of the Yankee tourists' notion of the tropics involves the island's fictionalization into an episode of the American television series *The Millionaire*, with the islanders in the role of grateful recipients of wealthy Uncle Sam's tourist dollars and foundation grants.¹⁷ Like the faithful secretary, Michael Anthony (not to be confused with the real writer), tracking down the object of his billionaire employer's beneficence, the American Leonard eagerly announces his intention to give away a million dollars. The fact that at the end of the story Leonard is no more likely to hand out money than is the American Frank, the narrator, to give Selma sexual satisfaction (pp. 159, 229, 234) is an obvious comment on the small-screen disillusionment bound to follow the islanders' wide-screen fantasies.

Black Orpheus is at least partly Jean-Paul Sartre's vision of a black Africa heroically transcending the alienated existence forced upon it by the European imperative of assimilation and reclaiming its Negro identity. The reverse side of the coin is depicted in the monologue 'Tell Me Who to Kill', its references to made-in-Hollywood films indicating

the connection between the willing participation in the process of assimilation and existential betrayal. A 'joker and a mocker', the narrator's Mephistophelean Uncle Stephen dangles before the eyes of his country brother's simple-living West Indian Hindu family the temptation of a new and seemingly glamorous existence by giving his nephews movie money and later by encouraging the illusion that the youngest male nephew, Dayo, has what it takes for the educational rite of passage into upper-middle-class respectability as a 'doctor, lawyer, anything' (*Free State*, p. 77).¹²

So seductive has been the appeal of assimilation into the white world that, as the narrator bitterly acknowledges, he has allowed his own life to be deadened — 'now the dead man is me' — and his fraternal affection to be soured into hatred by years of thankless drudgery in London to sustain the fantasy that Dayo is being stamped with the vocationally *chic* identity of aeronautical engineer or computer programmer (pp. 80, 97). The ease with which the monologue slips from an account of the two brothers' relationship to the recollection of films and screen stars — Laurence Olivier and Joan Fontaine in *Rebecca*, Henry Fonda and Tyrone Power in *Jesse James*, Robert Taylor in *Waterloo Bridge*, and Farley Granger in *Rope* (pp. 68, 73, 77-78, 102, 108) — suggests that these strangers in a strange land are being clamped into alien cultural identities which no more allow for their own development as West Indians (or, for that matter, as autonomous human beings) than do the scripts the screen stars, especially Hitchcock's, must follow. And in recalling films dealing with such themes as the loss of innocence, the destructive influence of a stronger personality over a weaker, and betrayal by a comrade, the narrator implicitly admits that in attempting to force Dayo into a social and cultural role the standards of which are as remote from the latter's very limited attainments as is the Farley Granger 'pretty boy' image from his 'labourer's face', he, the elder brother, has participated in his own as well as Dayo's betrayal and degradation, with their self-alienation completed by the marriage of the one into a family of British whites and the other's sado-masochistic liaison with his 'white bitch' lover, Frank (pp. 70, 106).

The two wives in *Rebecca*, the two brothers in *Jesse James*, the two murderers in *Rope* — these doublings remind us that role-playing fragments. In acting out a part the player may split into irreconcilable halves. Jimmy Ahmed becomes two beings — his upper body the Mao-shirted revolutionary, his public role, and his naked lower half the frightened youngster unable to give Jane, or any woman, sexual satis-

faction (*Guerrillas*, p. 75). Indeed, roles may proliferate uncontrollably, one spawning another until the divided self becomes an exploded non-self. The collection of pseudonyms used by the Trinidadian would-be Black Power hero, Michael de Freitas, during his short, violent career was a 'haphazard succession of roles' — roles not only assumed to escape from both a private neurosis and the law but also imposed on him by white liberals for purposes of their own — ending in a loss of self: 'so many personalities ... so many voices: the real man ... lost' ('Michael X', pp. 13, 23-25, 48).

Over the last decade Naipaul's attention has broadened from the problems of the West Indian to include other areas of the Third World, where he finds a similar tendency to allow pretence to parade as authentic, practical achievement — the people of an economically stagnant Uruguay acting as though still living in boom times that in fact ended years ago with the decline of foreign investment and revolutionary Iran rejecting modernity in its quest for an outdated ideal of Islamic purity.¹⁹ The finality of what Naipaul considers the contemporary Africans' simplistic interpretation of their past and present — the 'whole history of human deficiencies ... entirely explained by an interlude of (foreign) oppression and prejudice, which has now been settled'²⁰ — raises the suspicion that under the spell of political independence the black African thinks of his territory as a theatre stage easily made bare after the last act of one historical drama in preparation for the first act of the next.

A prominent theme in Naipaul's latest novel, *A Bend in the River*, is the destructive effect of substituting theatre for practicality, the heroic pose for political restraint, in the post-colonial Third World, specifically a black African state resembling Zaïre. The vacuum created by the end of colonial rule has been turned into a stage for an epic production starring the 'Big Man', the leader whose portrait posters are as ubiquitous as those of Orwell's Big Brother. It appears that the people are expected to be satisfied with bit parts as loyal spear carriers, or as an acquiescent chorus, in the leader's drama, that of the victorious son redeeming the hardships and humiliations once, during colonial times, suffered by his mother, now transformed into a symbol of the nation.²¹

The official slogans and proclamations notwithstanding, we suspect that this romance of political idealism masks a naturalistic drama of exploitation — a sub-genre borrowed from the Europeans' repertory (p. 17). What is billed as a new kind of African theatre dispensing with such colonial stereotypes as 'monsieur' and 'madame' is actually the revival of a much older play — its theme, republican virtue triumphant — that ran

for several years in pre-imperial Paris: the decree goes out that now the people must become '*citoyens* and *citoyennes*' (p. 160).

Within the Big Man's national stage is the showcase 'Domain', part holiday resort, part educational centre constructed in the middle of the bush. It is not only a model of the Africa of the future but also a 'miracle', a stage within a stage for a miracle play within a play — the drama of the chief's creation of a new African (pp. 100-101). However, as the narrative unfolds, we suspect that what is being enacted is not an extravaganza of Revolution Victorious but something far older — a ritual sacrifice in which leader and people exchange roles as sacrificer and sacrifice. Elsewhere Naipaul refers to the black leader who, using political power to cope with some private obsession, ends by scorning his followers and then being victimized by them ('Michael X', p. 70). In *Bend* the contempt and the victimization dovetail. The very signs of the African leader's power — the multiple identities of soldier, political Big Man, national President, potent tribal chieftain, even god 'creating a miracle' for his worshippers, and his effigies scattered across the land (pp. 100, 125, 168) — hint at the reverse, an exploded self, or, as though an assertion that he alone is fit to meet the ritualistic need of the masses, a dismembered sacrifice.

But the leader's near apotheosis, the process by which he is shown to be worthy for so sacred a role, involves the people's degradation. The preservation of the Big Man's power in the post-colonial state involves the common people's step backward into a condition barely distinguishable at times from their old colonial shame. As the President's white mercenaries swagger around a hotel lobby, the Negro employees, acting on cue, immediately become 'abject' (p. 76), as though to demonstrate how easy it is for them to resume the role of white man's servant. Moreover, service under the leader is a burden crushing the spirit of the people, as is indicated by Naipaul's description of one of the President's young followers, Ferdinand, who, 'below' the 'larger-than-life' photograph of the Big Man, looks 'ill', 'shrunken, and characterless' (p. 271).

The theatrical gesturing Naipaul claims to find in the Third World ex-colonial societies is not so much the product of conscious choice as of the force of surrounding circumstances. It is as though roles are played out in conformity to a script handed out to the actors page by page. The passivity that inclines Salim, the narrator and central character in a private drama of adultery, to receive the sexual favours of the European Yvette as handouts — 'I took everything as it came' (p. 191) — is also that of Naipaul's passive, uncreative Africans who, it is claimed, 'simply

accept' the gifts of civilization from the outside world without working to add to their stock of benefits (p. 142).

The rebellion that breaks out reflects what Naipaul, in 'A New King for the Congo: Mobutu and the Nihilism of Africa', refers to as the 'rage of primitive men ... finding that they have been fooled and affronted' (*Essé Perón*, p. 24). In *Bend* this rage is like a state of trance, so that even the rebels become the participants in a ritual sacrifice in some magical way supposed to banish history and restore to the people the timeless simplicity of the 'beginning', of a primal paradise. From the bush emerges a guerrilla army of liberation that, as Salim's servant, Metty, predicts, is 'going to kill and kill' — which is the 'only way ... back to the beginning' (pp. 6, 275).

In 'Flag' a bare nightclub stage, empty of scenery and performers, is called the 'perfection of drama' (p. 227). In Naipaul dramatically intense action often moves toward its opposite, an anti-dramatic blankness, toward the silence and darkness that falls over a stage once the actors, their real or pretended passions spent, have removed their make-up and left. In *Bend* the concluding description of the refugee-filled barge disappearing into the thick tropical night makes one think of klieg lights extinguished on a movie set or the last fade-out of the completed film: 'The searchlight lit up the barge passengers.... Then there were gunshots. The searchlight was turned off; the barge was no longer to be seen' (p. 278).

However, Naipaul's own spotlight, his critical intelligence, is still trained on the large and small stages of the contemporary world. It is, I think, safe to assume that he is discovering new theatres and new performances.

NOTES

1. 'Epilogue, From a Journal: The Circus at Luxor', in *In A Free State* (New York: Knopf, 1971), pp. 252-53.
2. Alan Kennedy, *The Protean Self: Dramatic Action in Contemporary Fiction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), p. 277, fn.
3. *Mr Sone and the Knights Companion* (London: Deutsch, 1965), p. 102.
4. For a discussion of the theme of identity in Naipaul and Conrad see Linda R. Anderson, 'Ideas of Identity and Freedom in V.S. Naipaul and Joseph Conrad', *ES*, 59, No 6 (1978), 516-17.
5. *The Law of El Dorado* (New York: Knopf, 1970), p. 155. Hereafter *El Dorado*.
6. *Guerrillas* (New York: Knopf, 1975), pp. 43-44.

7. 'Michael X and the Black Power Killings in Trinidad', in *The Return of Eva Perón* (New York: Knopf, 1980), pp. 57-58. Hereafter 'Michael X', *Eva Perón*.
8. 'St Kees: Papa and the Power Set', in *The Overcrowded Barracoon* (London: Deutsch, 1972), p. 221.
9. *A House for Mr Binsw* (London: Deutsch, 1961), pp. 169-70, 296-97, 311.
10. *The Mimic Men* (London: Deutsch, 1967), pp. 93, 272-73. Hereafter *Mimic Men*.
11. 'A West Indian Culture?' in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, 30 May 1965, p. 23.
12. 'A Flag on the Island', in *A Flag on the Island* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), p. 187. Hereafter 'Flag', *Flag*.
13. For a discussion of political role-playing, see Richard Johnson, 'Politics and V.S. Naipaul', *JCL*, 14, No 1 (1979), 100-108.
14. *The Suffrage of Elvira* (London: Deutsch, 1958), p. 207.
15. 'Bogart', in *Miguel Street* (New York: Vanguard, 1959), pp. 9-10.
16. *The Middle Passage* (New York: Macmillan, 1963), pp. 58-61.
17. The Millionaire was shown in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, from April 1964 to August 1965, according to John T. Barsouti, Program Director of the Trinidad & Tobago Television Company, Ltd., in a letter to the author, dated 27 March 1981. In the article 'A West Indian Culture?' he indicates that he was visiting Port-of-Spain — perhaps for as long as several months — during the first half of 1965 (p. 23). Thus it is possible that he had some knowledge of the series while working on 'Flag', which was completed in August of that year.
18. Like Whymper in *Knight's Companion*, Uncle Stephen and the narrator himself are in a sense demonic types ready to barter relief from the awareness of potential non-being (or of cultural inferiority) for a soul. See J.F.T. Bugental, *The Search for Authenticity* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), pp. 43-44.
19. 'The Return of Eva Perón', in *Eva Perón*, p. 136; 'Among the Believers', in *The Atlantic*, July 1981, pp. 28-36, 38-45, 48 *passim*.
20. Interview with Adrian Rowe-Evans, *Transition*, No 4 (December 1971), p. 57.
21. *A Bend in the River* (New York: Knopf, 1979), p. 136.

Derek Walcott

INTERVIEW

In the autumn of 1980 Derek Walcott toured Wales as the recipient of the Welsh Arts Council's International Writer's Prize. This interview was conducted during that visit. Interviewer: Ned Thomas.

Can I start by asking you where you are now living and working?

What I've been doing recently is getting invitations to be at various American universities for one semester at a time — I've been at Yale, in the department of Afro-American studies, and also in the drama department with young playwrights; and I've been at Columbia, this is now my second time there, and I'm also doing a class at New York University with Joseph Brodsky. The two of us share a class — I've never done this before — and I find it quite exciting. Next year I'm going to be at Harvard doing the same thing as Seamus Heaney did. So most of my working life is spent in the States — it's a bit of a wrench, because ideally I would like to teach in the Caribbean in the University, and also work in the theatre there, because the theatre itself is very much a part of my being in the Caribbean.

Does this mean you've had to stop directing, except occasionally?

Well, there is some plan for me to be able to do things in the summer, with a company in the Caribbean, so I hope I shall be able to do theatre work between April and September.

How do you organize time for your writing?

Because I write plays as well as poems, and recently have been working on a prose book as well, I always have something to do in the mornings whether it is re-writing a scene from a play or whatever — I mean I don't

get up in the morning saying 'I am going to write poems', but you can always work on them. My ritual is still, even if I live in a temperate country, to get up very early in the morning, have a cup of coffee, watch the sunrise come up, smoking like hell unfortunately and drinking too much coffee. So my working day, if I've had a good night's sleep, and I try to sleep as much as I can, starts at about 6 a.m. I get tired of work at about half-past ten to eleven in the mornings, and I never work in the afternoons except when I'm lying down scribbling, and never at night, absolutely not at night. It's a terrific kind of life when you're on an island, a small island like Tobago, where you can get up early in the morning — it's cool and it's quiet and beautiful — you work and then go for a swim; that's really millionaire's paradise, but you don't have to be rich to do it though.

Is the Caribbean getting a harder place to live these days?

In many ways, yes.

The Star-apple Kingdom seemed to me a rather anguished poem.

We are going in a very frightening direction. I think part of it is the result of panic. I think the kind of socialism we are embracing — the kind of Marxism if you wish — is on a very superficial level in terms of any effect, any presence it can have in terms of world power. What the leaders in the Caribbean refuse to admit to themselves is that we are powerless. We are powerless people. Or I would say that the real power we have is in our people, in the artists and so on. This may sound very visionary and silly and adolescent, but once the Caribbean accepts the fact that this is where its power lies, then it is possible that what I thought would happen might again begin to be discerned; if we see that the richness we have is in the cultural diversity, the mixture, the fact that we *do* live together very well, only disturbed by politicians. Anyone can exploit, with the proper techniques, the Afro-Indian division, but the day to day life in Trinidad of African and Indian is visibly normal. Guyana was of course the example — *that* was provoked.

It is a bitter thing for me to see people manipulated. It becomes more and more infuriating. When you are younger and you don't know who are in power you are in awe. When the people who are in power are in some cases your own age, or younger, then you see them, you see right through them, and that infuriates you.

It's the same everywhere. But presumably underlying those divisions that can be exploited, there is the basic economic problem.

But the economic problem is again exploited — by the old leaning-on-slavery attitude, which is very convenient; or leaning-on-capitalism, or leaning on American interference, or anything you want to lean on but the reality of the fact that you are poor. We still do not tell people that they are poor. The Caribbean politicians describe problems to their own people as if they, the politicians, were spokesmen at the big tables of the world, as if someone from Trinidad or Jamaica really counts for Kissinger or Kosygin.

But I'm saying that one needn't become a satellite simply because one accepts that one is on a lower level of economic life. If only one could be addressed simply and directly by the politicians, saying 'Look, we are poor, this is where we begin'. If the mass says 'Yes, we are poor', then you can say 'What are we going to do about it?' and begin from there. But what is said is something about Russia, or 'America is giving us a hard time', or 'The Arabs are giving us a hard time' — it's a whole system of blaming. I'm not saying the problems aren't there, but instead of turning around and confronting them — which metropolitan countries do because their problems are close to them — we don't do it, we pretend to be metropolitan countries with problems which can be settled around the conference tables of the world. The politicians have a misconception of what the Caribbean people will accept. We have come out of slavery in something close to living memory, and people who have endured that should not be encouraged to think in terms of becoming rich overnight, nor do they believe that it is possible. But if you delude them into thinking either that a completely Socialist economy is going to do that, or that the diametric opposite is going to cure things, then you're doing a very dangerous thing. The violence that has come is a consequence of that lie. We are paying for telling people that if they get rid of X, then it will all be theirs. You give them a sense of inheritance and right which generates a violence. These people put themselves in a position where they themselves will be annihilated by the very people they incite.

I read somewhere (though it doesn't entirely square with my own reading) that in The star-apple Kingdom you are writing in the person of Michael Manley.

It is obviously Jamaica. I am — I was — very close to Michael Manley,

but it isn't him entirely, and of course the poem is modelled very closely on Marques' *Autumn of a Patriarch*. The persona is a leader who is in Jamaica, but his background is not Manley's background, there's a great house fiction. So the character does become fictional, but I think what I was concerned about was that Michael does have a profound love of his country, Jamaica, and he's a fighter, and I wanted to catch the poise of anguish that comes from wishing for a kind of order that can only perhaps be imposed by a kind of discipline, 'heavy manners' if you want. The poem is poised at that point and I've been criticised by radicals who say 'It doesn't get you anywhere, it's the usual middle-of-the-road balance thing'. But that's the poise of the poem. My private opinion about what should or should not happen has nothing to do with it. I have always been very careful — that's the balance of the poet — not to move into propaganda, on either side. Rigidity comes in when the poet is tempted in a totalitarian regime to appear to be non-conformist, or in a democratic regime to make sure he is radical enough.

I understand you are bringing out a new volume of poems in the Spring. What direction will that take? You seem recently to have been writing longer poems, a number of them in a persona which allows you to develop if not dialect, then an accented version of standard English.

In the new book I have a long poem called 'The Spoiler's Return' which is based on a Calypsonian — I won't go into that, but that's the one dialect poem in there. You see I no longer think in terms of a tool — either dialect or standard English — I think, if it works, it works, for the one or the other.

Perhaps it's the situation in the Caribbean, perhaps it's becoming older and getting a deepening sense of history, but I find myself very drawn, not so much to the style but to the *idea* of the Roman poets. I have this feeling of being on the outskirts, in a colony or provinces that have changed empires, from British to American, and economically I cannot see us avoiding, not a fate but the reality that the world is divided between America, Russia, China. That is what has been happening. I've felt parallel with some of the Latin poets, coming from my archipelago on the fringe towards the capital. I'm interested in that balance. I also think that very often the capital can become numb, because its preoccupation is with power, with the function of power, and somehow the poetry goes out of it. If you want to put it this way you can say that where there's concrete, there the power is, and the further you go from the concrete the more you come to the vegetation, nature and so on.

And the correlative of that is that at the fringes there is no power.

Yet you're drawn to it, you're looking in that direction. I think also that there can be long periods, long, long centuries, in which a civilization can be very powerful and not produce a culture, and we forget that. When we're within a dying system we don't know it is dying. Maybe Europe, for all its economic vigour — I'm not saying it is a dying culture — but maybe it is not the centre of the spirit. The centre of poetry need not be in London — it may be in Wales, it may be anywhere else but in that concrete and steel thing.

I think it's very exciting to be *outside* English literature, English literature in a hierarchic sense. Now if I wrote well as an Englishman, in any sizeable history of English literature I would at least have a footnote. If I worked hard enough I'd achieve a footnote. There's this hierarchic thing, your name would be there somewhere between A and Z. Now most poets in a tradition have that kind of listlessness that if they work mildly enough something is going to happen, and certainly if they live long enough they will become part of some kind of club. Now we don't have that in the Caribbean luckily. The danger which we *do* have, of course, is that if you're virtually the only writer in some area you become over-important. But finally your responsibility and your own critical assessment of yourself is freer. You don't really think of yourself as being part of a tradition, nor do you think of yourself as some fantastic pioneer. You simply are in a position where you can judge yourself by what your own estimate of your work is. In that way I'm completely free. I'm not part of the establishment, I'm not part of the gang, I'm not part of the club.

If I've worked out the dates right, you're now fifty, and you've already projected yourself in poems as senex, the oak, and so on. Do you think of life as stages? Do you think of what you have to write now as being different?

In terms of the poetry I think that for a long time I didn't realise that I was being paid any attention to, and that kept me clear-headed. Now I'm a little disconcerted that there are a lot of things being published about my work — a lot of praising things are being said — and I'd like to shake off any responsibility that one might feel about becoming 'important'. I think it's possible to do it because I can always go back to the Caribbean and be just someone else, you know.

And probably to be discovered younger is more dangerous to one's self-judgement than later.

I think that's what attracts me to the Roman poets. I think there's something about age in them that I find understandable — the Horatian farm, that kind of thing, the retreat, not from fame but into a craft. At fifty I feel secure, I think for the first time in my life. Certainly I feel sure about who I am and what I want to do. Towards this period of my life I would like to write just much better, much clearer, much simpler and much more honestly. Not that I was dishonest, but around fifty you come to a kind of honesty in which the awkward can be accepted, and what you're good at can also be accepted. There's a kind of equanimity that comes.



Derek Walcott. Photo: Anna Rutherford.

Mark O'Connor

RUNDEBRANDEN BIRD-ROCK (Norway)

1. *Ålesund*

Gray sky and a sea of surly ripples
among mountains and mists at the world's end.
Beyond's where the Earth loses width
and sharpens to the polar peak. Plateaus
are the ice-giants' anvil. Groaning
they batter the fire-spawn, the frozen conglomerate
rock, crow-baring cornets and ariets apart,
divorcing the fire-stream. This is Manichee country.
You hear only the strain and crack, horn locked
on horn, of opposing primaries. Predatorial ice
leaps on the back of brontosaural lava. In anger
the gray granite rock turns to razor scarps.
Segosaurus spines, despairing outposts
that shear the advancing ice.

This is a battle whose daily reports
last a million years, will end
when the victim's last bones are broken.

2. *Above Ålesund*

From the high plateau mist swells
and spills, down ice-boulder slopes,
over saddle-backs, flows with a slow
uncarthy sigh like a troll's despairing breath.

through gaps between peaks, to a plain
that was once and will be again the floor
of a blue-amber ice-stream, ten fir-trees deep,
drifting North ten metres a year. Here will be white
as Greenland was green.

3. *Rundebranden Port*

Oyster-catchers, two by two in pall-bearers' suits
dandy and doodle for worms in the sphagnum turf.

On this calm sea that laps on the world's end
the sun at his 10 pm summer squint
has run to the paradoxical North, sinks
on a sloping moor where pure water slides
down an even eighth-inch of sheep manure
softened and steeped to a greasy film.
A harmony of summer skies and men. You sleep
to the sound of a coverlet of streams
dividing the day's takings, and the scru-unch
of sheep's-teeth on wiry salt-grass.

Suppliers slide in from the heaving gray
to a plain of ripples gray as desert pebbles,
scales of the long dark oil-greased snake of Ocean,
the scrap-fed one, the turd-disposer, herring-father,
not-filled, eider-breeding, steel-destroying,
all-providing gray.

4. *Rundebranden Rock*

On this cliff where the thistledown blows up
a thousand feet a minute, the crow's effortless soar
tells all you need to know of mountain winds.
The puffins come spearing in hard, fast strokers whose blows
beat the eye, make two wings seem four, bringing
phosphorus to green the gorse and plump the midge
out of fish-offering ocean.

Fulmars and gannets, those goose-big terns, interweaving
the shuttle of up-draughts, come in like a paratroop drop,
in waves. Then, like powered balsa cut-outs, slide
circling and screaming as they try to hit
the right jut of rock at right height and speed
— those home rocks that pulse and shimmer like haze,
ungraspable from the sober air. To miss
sends their screaming reptilian brains
on a long retreat and curve with not a wingbeat
wasted, out over the sea that blows from Greenland,
so far that the black wing-patches never show
until they cross a line of foam. The eye
cannot chart a gannet's course, sees
only direction, not its foreshortened speed,
then they turn for home — a second tumultuous charge
aiming fifty feet below their nest till pull
of the ledges splits the screeching flock.
Closing too fast like doomed ships on those skiey rocks
each turns in a desperate upward stall, rises to its nest,
working more in five feet than the last half mile,
— a frantic flutter to lose speed and settle. The webbed
toes touch, wings raised at the elbows try to fold, but
their unspent speed tips them forward, they tumble and drop
down five hundred feet of cliff, then turn with the flock
in that long swift S-figure over the bay
that six minutes later brings them home.

Letter Perfect

Stroke by stroke the language was slipping away from him.

My dear nephew, he had written in his clear miniscule hand, *I am sorry, though not, of course, surprised, to hear of your financial woes. And I am far from deaf to the eloquence of your arguments.* (There was charity for you, he thought. His nephew on paper was like a cow on tiles.) *I have long been aware that the economic climate in the dairying regions is neither invigorating nor, shall we say, sal-* ... Damn! What was that word? *Salub* —? *Solubr* —? ... It was too vexing. ...*neither invigorating nor healthy* he concluded irritably.

Once, so it seemed, every word in the dictionary was his to dispose. Today he sometimes erred, even blundered. The purely physical penalties of age he could have borne, borne gladly. What terrified him was to know that after each of those dizzy spells, with their familiar nausea and flickering pains, another small part of his brain was gone, blocked off by a tiny blood clot as if it had never been.

True. I promised my late brother to aid you in whatever way I could. You will concede that I have always done so. But the sum you entreat is extravagant.

A lance of sunlight burst between tightly-drawn blinds, splitting for a moment the darkness of the room; but the old man saw only the letter that lay in his reading-lamp's circle.

My personal fortune has long been willed to the library of my old university college. You will appreciate, dear boy, the fitness... No! He went back and erased 'fitness'. ...*the felicity of this. Monies earned from my books will be returned to perpetuate the influence of those spirits from whom, in part, I drew my inspiration.*

Charles William Blackwell rested, well pleased with the rhythm of that last paragraph. How the deft placing of words could expedite one's affairs! Even when temporizing with this illiterate boor. *None the less, the problem you raise is a considerable one...*

It was indeed. Fingers that seemed made of creased lizard skin rather than any human material relaxed their grip on the pen and moved upwards to scratch absent-mindedly at the scaly throat.

Reluctantly he smoothed his nephew's letter open again, noting with disdain the smudged paper and the ragged lines of printed capitals. They looked, he thought, as if hacked out with a spade rather than scripted with a pen.

DIR UNKEL CHARLZ (Gary had written) I WOZ TAWKING TOO MY BANK MANAJER TOODAY...

When Gary was twelve a teacher at his country school had realized that the boy, though clever with his hands, would never learn to read and write in the normal way. She had switched tactics, teaching him to write words exactly the way he heard them. It had worked. Gary would never decipher more than a sentence or two from a printed book, but he could, on occasions, express himself almost fluently in writing.

HEE SED THE FARM IZ TOO MUCH IN DET BEEKOZ OV THE DROWTS. I HAV TOO SEL MY KOWZ AND PUT IN SHEEP. AWLSO I HAV TOO PAY HIM TEN THOWSAND DOLARS BEEFAW EESTER. AWLSO I NEED THERTY THOWSAND FOR EVREEIHING INKLOODING THAT. How clearly the illiterate expressed himself, thought his uncle. I HATE ARSKING FOR HELP BUT DAD SED TOO IF I HAD TOO. Hardly elegant! But at least he knew Gary meant what he said. It did hurt to ask. Meanwhile, Charles reflected, this promise of his to a dying brother might be hard to evade. His brother had helped him in the past, with money as with everything else — especially at the start of his career when Charles William Blackwell was a gangling country lad whose name no publisher wanted to know...

After this last sentence four words had been scored out: NOE WOT I MEEN? 'Know what I mean?' was how Gary ended every second sentence. There were no four words more calculated to irritate his uncle. 'No I don't', he would answer, 'What do you mean?'

I GES THINGZ IS CRUK IN TULARUK was the concluding banality, BUT EVREEWUN SEZ THER GETING BETER. This too was impeccable. Charles's enquiries confirmed that the rural recession was ending. Gary was a good farmer, and with his debts paid off and his farm converted, could expect to succeed. But to give his hard-won money to this country churl. Scrawled across the bottom of the letter was the infuriating apology PLEEZ EXKOOZ KRONIK INGLISH. Charles William Blackwell gritted his teeth and hardened his heart.

I regret I can give you no answer yet, not for some weeks. Meanwhile I advise you to practise all possible economies. But was this fair? Gary needed an answer urgently. After a minute Charles put the letter aside.

'Suppose I have another stroke', he thought. 'A had one. Gary might come here to look for me.... And could intimidate me if he chose.' But no. That was absurd. Gary at least was honest. Yet what if Charles found himself some day being persuaded to sign something whose contents he no longer understood? After a moment he dismissed the thought as morbid. 'By the time I'm dull enough to be duped by Gary', he decided, 'I'll be well beyond making or changing wills!'

He was frightened because he knew no remedy for the Voices he had begun to hear in his head. For the hundredth time he told himself it would have been easy to write them off as waking dreams, but for their utter clarity. For instance:... He concentrated; and almost at once a transmission began.

Sixty years underground! a high childish voice intoned. Sixty dead years Charlie buried me. Oh yes! A babble of other voices began, lower, echoing the same phrases, remote yet clear, like inaccessible trombones.

What did it mean? But, as suddenly as a dream fades on waking, the words were gone from his memory, and a new message replaced them. *Wattle pollen, fairy bread. Take it home, my mother said.* That made no sense, though it suggested children's songs in a sunny schoolyard. Then it too vanished before a new urgent message. *Mad as the mist and snow!* the Voices intoned. *Mad as the mist and snow!*

The transmission ceased. Words faded. But by an effort of will Charles William Blackwell reached back into his memory and hooked out the final line. *Mad as the mist and snow.* That at least sounded familiar — and if he could trace its source he might identify the Voices. Suddenly he was sure these words resided in one of the books on the opposite wall of his library.

The journey from writing-table to bookshelves, propping himself with his cane at every step, was slow but certain. He was on firm ground. No queen termite in the centre of her empire navigated so surely by blind senses as Charles in his library. Instinct guided him to the leather-bound COLLECTED DICKENS running the exact length of the fire-place.

No, it was not Dickens. Like a water-diviner's twig his hand was drawn downwards. Saurian fingers moved over a slim Horace (nestling under the bulk of Sir Walter Scott), fluttered briefly beside Homer, then settled on a tiny Yeats, that opened at the page:

Horace there by Homer stands,
Plato stands below.
And here is Tully's open page.
How many years ago
Were you and I unlettered lads
Mad as the mist and snow?

The verse was marked in pencil. Clearly he had noted it once before. But what did it mean? He turned back to the bookshelves for inspiration.

Without warning that random thudding came again in his chest. Sudden nausea. The familiar dizziness and shooting pains. He was choking. Too late he opened his mouth to call; but his voice was brassy, unreal. And then he was nowhere.

* * *

A strong young man in a check suit was bent over him, shouting. His face seemed odd somehow without a hat. That was Gary. He wanted to call back to him, from what seemed like the bottom of a tunnel, but no words came. 'It's Alright', Gary was shouting. 'Quack Says You'll Have Trouble Talking For A While. Do You Want To Sit Up?' He felt himself pulled upwards, while pillows were wedged in around him. Gary's hands were rough, unsycophantic; almost as if he were treating a sick cow on his property. Yet he omitted nothing that mattered to his patient.

With an effort Charles twisted his head. He was on the leather sofa in his library. 'Thank God They Found You', Gary was shouting. At least he looked as if he was shouting — actually he sounded faint. 'You've Been Unconscious For Two Days. Here, If You Want To Say Something, Write On This.' A stiff card and pencil were thrust into his hands. 'Anything You Want, Uncle Charles?'

Laboriously the old man took the pencil and wrote: I WONT TO REST. One of those words looked wrong; he was too tired to work out which. But Gary understood. 'Righto Uncle.' But then: 'Do You Feel Up To Being Moved Back To Your Room?'

That frightened him. To be carried away from his books, his leather-bound comrades, perhaps for ever. Whatever it cost, he had to resist... Slowly he lifted the pencil to renew the monstrous labour of communication. But Gary — bless him! — had understood. 'Tell You What, Uncle. You Might Prefer To Stay Here With Your Books. They're Sort Of Company For You, Know What I Mean?'

Yes, he did know what Gary meant! Grateful, he sank back, over-

whelmed by their shared understanding. He closed his eyes. Some terrible thought still fluttered against them like a moth. Something he had to remember. Something about books, and money. He ignored it, and after a while it went away. Then, before long, he slept.

* * *

He woke relieved. His mind was a peaceful harbour that only yesterday had been crowded with jostling boats. Now something inside him was going... dissolving... So simply.... Like crystals in water, he thought.

Then he remembered. ...something to do for Gary. ...the right decision... he saw that now. The only one. He was tied to Gary by bonds of blood, need — understanding. Let the books mind the books, he told himself. We Blackwells will stick together.

It was too early to summon a lawyer, but he could make a start on the drafting. This was the last time he would need his skill with words. He took up the card and pencil. His handwriting shocked him. It was large, spidery like a six year-old's, with strange dendritic quavers on the curves of his g's and f's. He switched to printed capitals.

I, CHARLES WILLIAM BLACKWELL, be slowly inscribed,
BEEING OF QWITE SOUND MYND...

Messiahs and Millennia in Randolph Stow's Novels

The novels I shall concentrate on in discussing messiahs and millennia in Stow's work are *To the Islands*, *Tourmaline*, *Visitants*, and *The Girl Green as Elderflower*. *Tourmaline* and *Visitants* are the two which most clearly relate to millenarian themes. *Tourmaline* records the growth, and collapse, of a millenarian cult centred on the messianic or would-be messianic figure of the diviner Michael Random. *Visitants* is a structurally more complex exploration of three millenarian visions and their communal and personal repercussions, although the connotations of the title are not restricted to cargo or flying saucer cults. These two novels are therefore central in any discussion of Stow's treatment of millenarianism. Underlying all millenarian beliefs, however, and not merely the Judaeo-Christian ones, is the concept of salvation, or deliverance, or redemption, although ideas about the nature of the salvation, the mode of deliverance, and the agent or agents of redemption vary enormously in surface detail. The anthropologist Kenelm Burridge says that in principle the millennium is equivalent to salvation and to redemption itself, a condition of being in which humans become free-movers, in which there are no obligations, in which all earthly desires are satisfied and therefore expunged.¹ *To the Islands* is very much concerned with redemption, on the personal and communal levels, and *The Girl Green as Elderflower*, the most affirmative of Stow's novels, is a record of the saving of Crispin Clare. The novel was also, literally, the salvation of *Visitants*, in that the writing of it enabled Stow to complete that novel.

It must be stressed from the outset that none of these novels can be reduced to an allegorical scheme or a series of symbols. Stow's brilliance as a writer lies partly in his ability to suggest and evoke complex spiritual or psychic states through images which accrete, rather than define or circumscribe, meaning. In the Prologue to *A Haunted Land*, for example, Jessie returns to Malin. 'And suddenly she saw the great red

cliff of Malin Pool rise up in front of her, the wide water and the white gums, and this was true changelessness.² The pool and the red cliff are of considerable significance in this early novel, but become far more so as a recurring image in *To the Islands*, where rocky cliffs and water resonate from the Marston epigraph to Stephen Heriot's final confrontation with the universe. To say this is not to suggest the cerebral imposition of symbolic pattern on descriptive texture. Stow's landscapes are drawn from life, acutely and sensitively observed aspects of a real country as distinct from an imagined one. At the same time Stow's landscapes are more than accurately depicted backdrops in front of which the drama of the human psyche is enacted. For example, the pool images in *To the Islands* can be seen to link imaginatively in a way which relates them to the thematic motifs of salvation and redemption.

In the second chapter Justin tells the story of the Onmalmeri massacre which Heriot later claims began his second life, his second expiation. Heriot also asserts that in all his expiations there has never been a reconciliation. The massacre was set in process when the white boundary rider Mr George found two old native women in a billabong on the cattle run gathering lily roots. The husband is flogged and his spears broken. He throws one of the broken spears and pierces Mr George's lung. In the following chapter a prelapsarian scene is created:

In the rays of the low sun the petals of lilies shone almost translucent against the shadowed hill, the far bank with its leaning pandanus. In that light the lily pads and the reeds glowed green as malachite, the water glistened, rock burned redly on the hilltop. Smooth as a fish, her wet hair flattened, a brown child turned in the water with her arms full of flowers.³

Bob Gunn sits in a 'mind-draining peace ... Then two wet brown arms holding long-stemmed lilies came round his neck. "Ah, brother", a soft seven-year-old voice crooned lovingly' (p. 62). Jenny finds Bob a piece of lily stem. The contrast with the billabong scene in the preceding chapter could not be sharper. Furthermore, this particular scene links with several others. The action of the twining arms has occurred earlier with Rex's mother Djediben and Helen: 'Djediben ... came and embraced her with thin black arms, touching gently with her palms Helen's breasts and shoulders, circling her waist with a spider arm. "Sister", she sighed lovingly, hiding her face against Helen's neck' (p. 19). A similar action occurs later, in chapter six. The scene (somewhat reminiscent of Conrad's Grove of Death in *Heart of Darkness*) is one of suspended life, where Heriot sits in a trance 'in the petrified attitude of his hosts' (p. 124)

until he becomes conscious of clammy discomfort and grime and swims naked in the pool. Heriot takes a tin of food to an old blind woman:

He fed her until she was satisfied, and then she reached out and touched his shoulder with her hand, and leaned over and rested her forehead there. In that way they sat for what seemed a long time in that timeless place, naked brown woman by naked white man, and he stroked the loose skin of her back with tenderness, wanting to laugh, wanting to weep. (p. 128)

Like other moments of peace in *To the Islands* this does not last. After the stoning of Rex the lagoon at the mission turns into a grey sea with all the lilies sunk. After the feeding of the old blind woman Heriot, full of violent and disordered feelings, sings above the corroborated tune verses from 'A Lyke-wake Dirge' (only the verses ending 'And Christ receive thy soul' are quoted). And it is after this that Heriot has his prophetic dream which oscillates wildly from joy to negation. Yet the moments of peace, the moments of reconciliation, have been there, and come again at the end of the novel in the Heriot/Justin farewell (after which Heriot hides his face against the body of the painted god), and in what is specifically termed 'the reconciliation of Heriot' (p. 202) when Rex confronts Justin: 'Yet there was still a strange dream quality in their movements, neither moving his eyes by a fraction from the other's. Until Rex, gently and humbly, bent his head and touched Justin's shoulder with his forehead; and the other man's hand appeared to lay lightly across his back' (p. 201).

When Heriot farewells Justin, who lays his bloody hands 'lightly on the old man's breast' (p. 199), he refers to him again as his 'good deeds', his salvation from himself. This is the second explicit reference to the medieval play *Everyman*. The first occurs in the fourth chapter when Heriot, after initially rejecting Justin, accepts their hunger, their need for each other: 'Behind the uneasy trees rose the hills, and beyond them again the country of the lost, huge wilderness between this last haunt of civilization and the unpeopled sea. "Welcome, my Good Deeds", whispered Heriot, "Now I hear thy voice, I weep for very sweetness of love"' (pp. 82-3). Like other allusions in *To the Islands* this must not be extended out of context, but nor should we ignore the potential richness of implication. *To the Islands* is in a sense an *Ars Moriendi*, suffused as it is with images of, allusions to, and statements about dying. It begins with the repetition of words like 'broken', 'cracked', 'crumbling', 'weariness', 'despair', and 'nothing'. Heriot sees himself as a great red cliff rising from the rocks of his own ruin, although even before he goes into the lost man's

country he feels moments of peace, for example with Father Way who appears fleetingly to Heriot as a figure of hope, fit to take over. As far as the mission is concerned Heriot is dying; the old stockship school must give way to the new, and the mission is given new life after Heriot leaves. Heriot's self-pitying desire to destroy what he has helped create is not realized. He becomes instead himself the agent of reconciliation. What must be stressed, however, is that the journeying together of Heriot and Justin is an analogue of mutual need, the interconnection of black and white. The journey is Heriot's exploration of that strange country his soul, but it is not a rejection of one kind of belief for another. For example, Heriot learns as much through his encounters with the solitary white figures, Rusty and Sam, as he does through Justin. The reconciliation with Rex begins with the interlocking thoughts of the two, one awake, one asleep, in chapter seven: the 'dialogue' begins with Rex 'crying in his mind: "Ah, brother, where you now, eh? Where you now?" and ends with Heriot's cry 'Oh, Rex, Rex, Rex. You will never go out of my mind' (p. 136). In the 'dialogue' each confesses to guilt. But the real turning-point in Heriot's relationship with Rex comes after Rusty's blunt rejoinder to Heriot's statement that it makes no difference whether he killed Rex or not. 'Except to the bloke', says Rusty. The image which comes immediately after this is interesting in its suggestions of rescue: 'Then new thoughts moved behind Heriot's eyes like yachts on an empty sea' (p. 155). For the first time he remembers Rex alive, and what it must have been to be Rex. Although Heriot has felt momentary compassion before, for the first time Rex's life presents itself 'whole' to him, 'all the ugly, aspiring, perverse passions of a living man' (p. 155). This is not a final revelation which makes the country of Heriot's soul whole and redeemed, but it is part of the movement towards reconciliation and love which is the only way Helen can define heaven. Heriot's journey is not an allegorically mapped out pilgrim's progress through sequential illuminations, but a tension of opposites, in landscape, in feeling, in concepts. 'This earth seduces me' says Heriot (p. 109). 'I renounce it' he says later (p. 167). It is a country of extremes, with peace rising like a wind from the plain and pools to bring a man back to life juxtaposed with bare rocks, stunted trees and withering heat. Heriot declares himself no longer a white man, 'I'm a blackfellow, son of the sun' (p. 115), but later with his terrible desolate voice quells the corroboree singers. It is this continual counterbalancing that gives the ending such rich ambivalence. 'Where is God?' Heriot has cried (p. 115). 'You are Wolaro, God', he says to the cave drawing of the rainbow

serpent. But then 'What does it matter what you're called' (p. 192). At the very end, in a series of apocalyptic images, Heriot's finding of the ultimate is depicted but not defined. Is the eagle Dantean and therefore part of the supernatural cycle, or bird of prey and therefore part of the natural cycle? Is the dazzling, blinding light Paradise, or annihilation? Is the gull which flies out from the rock and planes towards the sun until it is hidden in light an image of the spirit? We do not know. Our final image of Heriot, however, is one of acceptance and stillness. He kneels among the symbols of death, the bones, but stares out from the cave at the light. Although his eyes still search sun and sea for the least dark hint of a landfall, they are free of hope and fear.

The name Heriot signifies, as the O.E.D. puts it, a feudal service restored to a lord on the death of his tenant. This does suggest a strongly Christian element, linked with the concept of 'reckoning' in *Everyman* and the notion that life is lent, not given. We can see the red rock which Heriot throws into the sea as his free gift of himself to whatever the sea is, a redemption freely acquiesced in of what was lent. But John Beston, who has recorded Stow's own comment on the significance of the name, states 'Stephen's heriot is the return of his body to the Lord, thought of in Taoist rather than in Christian terms'.¹ Rather than, but not excluding, Stow's religious ideas like his allusions are eclectic. Rock and water are powerfully evocative images in more than one series of wisdoms. What is clear in *To the Islands* is that reconciliation, poor though Heriot might feel it, has been achieved. I have already quoted from the Rex/Justin scene, the penultimate in the novel. As Stephen and Gunn look down, Gunn, who has earlier decided to stay on at the mission, says 'Hard to believe it's over. Hard to believe. Nothing will be the same again'. Stephen bends his head. "No", he said quietly. "Nothing going to be the same", he promised' (p. 202). The promise is to Heriot.

To the Islands is a very good example of what I have referred to as Stow's eclecticism. Heriot might sing a wild corroborree song about himself just before he reaches the top of the cliff, but the final images are unassigned to a particular form of belief. The novel suggests, rather, that beliefs need not be in opposition, need not be exclusive. *Tourmaline* seems to negate that statement, and the Christian/Taoist opposition in the novel, has been argued cogently and sensitively.² The very fact, however, of Stow's return to messianic and millenarian subject matter in *Visitors* suggests that *Tourmaline* may be part of a pattern of exploration into the landscape of spiritual existence rather than a clear assent to the rightness of a particular discovery.

Tourmaline is, in more than landscape, reminiscent of the earlier poetry of T.S. Eliot. This is not to suggest that Stow's novel is a representation of any of Eliot's poetic worlds but that both writers at times participate in a shared universe. The same writers have attracted them, though not necessarily for the same reasons: Dante, the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists (the *Poésants* epigraphs are from Shakespeare and Ford), the metaphysical poets, Baudelaire, Pound, Conrad, St-John Perse. The use of literary allusions, most noticeably in *To the Islands*, could owe something to *The Waste Land*. Stow has found the concept of the objective correlative a useful one to have, particularly as a way of avoiding over-emotionalism, of keeping the subject-matter as well as the characters of his novels at a distance. Stow is a practising Anglican, although he admits to being a rather heterodox one in that he interprets some of the Anglican dogma in a Taoist way, and has been influenced by Eastern mysticism, particularly Taoism, since the age of sixteen.

Tourmaline is the red rock of *To the Islands* crumbled to dust, the life-restoring pools dried out. It is related to the dying land of *The Hollow Men*, and of the opening section of *The Waste Land*.

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,
And the dry stone no sound of water. (ll. 19-24)

Another Eliot poem which comes to mind when one reads *Tourmaline* is *Gerontion*, with its old man in a dry month waiting for rain. The Law is not blind (in fact the book focusses intensely on the visual nature of things) but then blindness in Eliot's old men is spiritual rather than physical, and the very clarity of the Law's vision of *Tourmaline* and its sons, whether that vision is remembered or imagined, counterpoints the moments when the Law's spiritual vision is blurred or blinded. And the Law is not being read to by a boy, but writing the testament of *Tourmaline*. Yet the Law's house is a decayed house (an image which also reverberates powerfully through *Poésants*), one that is merely tenanted, not owned. *Gerontion*'s concluding lines are 'Tenants of the house, / Thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season'. *Tourmaline*'s second sentence is 'More truly we are tenants; tenants of shanties rented from the wind, tenants of the sunstruck miles'. The Law is history, memory, 'What's not believed in, or if still believed, / In memory only, reconsidered passion'

(II. 40-1). And the Law, like most of Tourmaline, cries 'We would see a sign' (I. 17).

Tourmaline, like the Waste Land, is infertile; there are no children. Also, like the Waste Land, it is a place of imprisonment of a curiously self-imposed kind. When the Law says 'Yet I live on, prisoner of my ruined tower; my keys turned on myself now all the locks are gone' one remembers the lines from the fifth section of *The Waste Land*:

I have heard the key
Turn in the door once and turn once only
We think of the key, each in his prison
Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison (II. 411-14)

The Law forgets Bill Byrne's mother when he says no-one ever leaves Tourmaline, and of course Kestrel comes back, but it is strongly suggested, or believed, that the world beyond the deep blue hills is one of terrible danger. And that those who come out of that world, or back from that world, are dangerous. One of the Law's last statements, so reminiscent of Yeats's poem 'The Second Coming' is 'Wild beasts were loose on the world. Terrors would come. But wonders, too, as in the past. Terrors and wonders, as always' (p. 221). Tourmaline, in coma, a place most people think has been dead for years, dead, but not yet buried like Lacey's Find, is safe in its sterility, but what would happen if Tourmaline found itself capable of the awful daring of a moment's surrender?

I have stressed the Eliot connection with *Tourmaline* because its very pervasiveness suggests that Stow's imaginative starting point is the Eliot landscape, spiritual landscape. It also suggests that Stow is not setting up straw men, empty men, men of little weight (to allude to the St-John Perse epigraph) merely in order to blow them down.

The novel is an imaginative record of a future second coming, a third testament of man's covenant with God. The need of the town for new life, a new covenant, to replace, for example, the meaningless masses of paper in the Law's gaol, thrown there in despair after years and years of waiting, fuses with the need of the stranger, the diviner to 'make good and go home' (p. 21). These needs emerge slowly; out of their fusion comes the messianic figure. When the diviner is brought to Tourmaline he is burnt, terribly disfigured, deformed. The town, with its ritual washing, anointing, and keeping watch, creates out of this deformity a thing of beauty, and the diviner, seeing himself reflected in the pool of the town's eyes, comes to believe himself beautiful, like the hideous

negress in the French picture-book. Neither the illusion nor the breaking of it is 'funny' (p. 105). The diviner, like Lucifer, is a tragic figure. The Law glimpses the spiritual deformity of the diviner, just as he perceives the marred beauty under the ruined, scarred face of Byrnie. But the Law remembers with compassion.

It is true that there are other ways represented in the book, other religions, and that these remain as a potential answer to Tourmaline's deprivation. Structurally, however, the religions of Dave Speed and Tom Spring are peripheral. The central figure is the diviner and what he symbolizes. Furthermore, the relationship between the diviner and Dave and Tom is a complex one. For example, both the diviner and Dave talk of becoming authentic. 'We're coming true, mate', says Dave to Tom (p. 86). 'I want to be myself. To come true', says the diviner. The diviner remains inauthentic because his life has already been taken over. The fate of Dave Speed is unknown, although he and the diviner are linked again at the end: '[Dust] silted up the stock route well at Dave Speed's camp. It heaped in the sockets of the diviner's eyes' (p. 221).

Tom Spring begins as the diviner's mentor. To the Law's surprise Tom breaks his deep Quaker quiet and talks at length to the young man. Even after setting up his own domain the diviner reads a book lent to him by Tom. At first then there seems to be genuine communication between the two: Tom's luminous smile transfigures his lean face and Random's equally. The first break in this discipleship comes when Tom asks 'What if the Word was only "Barleys", after all?' (p. 46). It is clear that the belief that the Word is more than a child's convention enables the diviner to live. To face the possibility of nothingness, which, Tom suggests, is the first gate that has to be jumped (our last image of the diviner is his jumping the broken barbed wire of the fence which is literally the end of the road) is something the diviner cannot do. As the town creates him for its salvation, so he creates his God for his own. Tom at this stage when asked what his belief is, says: 'I'm still waiting. Who'd dare say before the end of the road?' (p. 46). Tom at first does not share Dave Speed's views but in chapter eleven the two achieve an impersonal, wordless understanding. It is here that Tom makes his first specifically Taoist statement, elaborated later in chapter thirteen. The Law has a glimmer of understanding, but lets his mind wander away to the familiar God. Tom too, then, fails to 'cure'. The luminous light goes out of him, leaving him cold and blank, a dead sun, just as the diviner loses all his light.

Tourmaline's then is a bitter heritage, but the novel is, finally, celebratory. Despite the return of Kestrel to take over the diviner's role there

is to be new life, Deborah's child. Despite the failure of Gloria Day's prayer for rain and the diviner's quest for water, as God's sign to him and to Tourmaline that he has come home, there is a kind of millennium after all, although it may never manifest itself apocalyptically on earth. The real garden of Tourmaline is the sky.

The much-praised, the inexhaustible stars above me, islands, ice-cold and burning,
The burning ice-cold purity of God

Love inexpressible, inexhaustible. My love for him, it, them. No matter if such love is not returned. In the contemplation of stars, in the remembrance of oceans and flowers, in the voice of the lone crow and the jacaranda-blue of far ranges, I have all I need of requital.

When I think that before the world began to die I did not know this love, I can praise the manner of its dying. On the tomb of the world, ice-cold, burning, I reach out with every nerve to the ultimate purity.

Lord, fill me with your sap and make me grow.

Make me tall as karri, broad as a Moreton Bay fig. Let me shelter all Tourmaline in my shade.

Birds in the air, sheep in the far green distance.

Love, love, love: like an ache, like an emptiness. Dear God, my gold, my darling.
(p. 102)

Many of those phrases are echoed or repeated on the concluding page of the novel.

Tourmaline is a complex and rich novel. Like *To the Islands* it gives no answers but many possibilities. What it does give us, among many other things, is a compelling account of the landscape of the human spirit. The failure of the messianic figure motivated by self-hate, yearning, and a ferocious pride, qualifies but does not negate the spiritual experience of Tourmaline. The failure of the millennium to manifest itself on earth, in Tourmaline, leaves a bitter heritage, but that is not to run it down. The Law endures, the tower waits. 'Terrors would come, but wonders too, as in the past.'

The central character of *Visitors*, Alistair Cawdor, is in some ways reminiscent of Michael Random, and it is significant that although the narrative techniques are different, the earlier novel, a first person narrative which reconstructs a two month period, the later one a series of monologues reconstructing a period half as long, the modes of establishing the central character in each novel are similar. Neither the diviner nor Cawdor is seen, as it were, from the inside. The Law specifically draws attention to this when he refuses to imagine what the diviner looked like when he was alone or what he thought. 'He was too confusing', the Law says. 'I will not try to pin him down' (p. 80). Again,

it is made clear that the Law reconstructs from later accounts two crucial scenes, the church scene with Agnus Day, and the scene of Deborah's conversion through shame. In *Visitants* our direct contact with Cawdor is restricted to notes from his patrol-book, hardly the most personal of documents, except for the first extract. For the most part Cawdor is seen through the eyes of others, sometimes even through the eyes of others seeing through others' eyes. For example Dalwood records: 'And although it was all baloney, although he didn't even know what they were thinking, it was funny too how they suggested, just by their attitudes, two devoted old parents making the most, while they had him, of their brave doomed bomber-pilot son.' And Osana watches Dalwood watching Cawdor. The effect of this in *Visitants* is extremely powerful: the more distanced Cawdor is by the technique the more sharply focussed he is for us, as though he is ringed by watching eyes. The extraordinarily public nature of his life is of course one of the stresses which fragments Cawdor. In both novels, too, the method of oblique characterization leaves us, as readers, free to give or withhold our assent. No character, no single character, is the interpreter or the spokesman. Stow's interest is not in arguing a case for or against particular beliefs, but in recording in as objective a way as possible how beliefs affect people and how they relate to each other. And for all the intensity of observation both the diviner and Cawdor retain a necessary element of mystery.

The two are similar in other ways. Both are outsiders, lone, lost men, suffering men. Both seek salvation, salvation from outside, and salvation from themselves. The diviner has, it is suggested, twice tried to kill himself and ends by running laughing into the red dust of the desert. Cawdor kills himself by starting on his wrists and finally cutting his throat. The motif of suicide, also present of course in *To the Islands*, is finally resolved in *The Girl Green as Elderflower*.

The title *Visitants*, as suggested earlier, has many connotations, and the skill with which Stow develops and interconnects these is admirable. The prologue itself, which is not fictitious, sets the range and the pattern. The range is from terrestrial visitants, colonists, missionaries, the whole clash of indigenous and outside cultures, to non-terrestrial visitants (in the Prologue flying saucer beings). The pattern is the shared experience, native and outsider, of the second type of visitants. The theme of the shared experience, the linking of the beliefs of the two cultures, is of course present in *Tourmaline* with the acceptance (qualified in Gloria Day) of the diviner as Mongga.

In its range of reference Stow's novel is not restricted to contemporary

visitants. The first time we see Cawdor, through Osana's eyes, he is lying on a bench in the belly of the workboat 'Igau', a corruption of 'Eagle', reading a book. Dalwood, the young Cadet P.O., has to call him three times before he gets any real response. The first call is 'Batman', the second 'Misa Kodo' (the islander pronunciation), the third the Christian name Alistair. Osana narrates: 'It was as if he thought someone else might be behind Mister Cawdor's book' (p. 15). The book is Prescott's *Conquest of Mexico*, and Cawdor's absorption in it becomes increasingly significant. At this stage Cawdor merely alludes to the *chinampa*: 'those wandering islands of verdure ... teeming with flowers and vegetables, and moving like rafts over the water'.⁸ Although this clearly links with the island and voyaging motifs in the novel it is not until Cawdor is 'taken over' by the Trobrianders' accounts of the star-machine, that he slashes in the margin of Prescott's account with a thick blue pencil, and eventually reads a passage to Dalton, his voice 'rising, growing sharper, as he read' (p. 110). This sequence, broken into by Browne's reading of the passage at the inquiry, culminates in Dalwood's memory of the night: 'And he shouted, in the roaring dark, while the rain came faster and the palms thrashed. "We're not alone", he shouted. "Ah, you thick lump, can't you see it? We're not alone" (p. 112). Dalwood has asked him 'Whose side are you on — the Martians?' and returns to the notion of Martians later in the cave sequence:

'You were talking Martian because you are a Martian. That's what I always thought. That's why the excitement over the saucer, it's got your people on board. People like you', I said, laughing at the idea, and yet it wasn't a joke, but something I'd seriously imagined, just before, in the dark. 'Your folks', I said, thinking of his wife and what it must have been like for her, trying to talk to that, to love that, that visitor.' (p. 131)

Dalwood is right when he suggests that Cawdor is obsessed by the star-machine, which he comes to see, in a very complex way, as his only salvation. Cawdor has obviously been fascinated by the account he has read in someone else's patrol book records of cargo-cult visitation in the remote island Kaga, which is visited in the first section of the book. He is so interested that he uncharacteristically goes on with his questions even when the islanders show signs of acute embarrassment and shame. *Shame*, an important aspect of pseudo-salvation in *Tourmaline*, is an insistent and complexly developed motif in *Visitants*. It is not until the second section of the novel, called 'Visitants', however, that Cawdor becomes deeply, personally, involved. The section is remarkable for its economic but

powerful building-up of psychic tension which explodes on the island of Kailuana in the third part of the novel, called 'Cargo'. There is the mystery of Metusela, the madman, the deformity, himself a visitant although he claims to have come home. There is the propeller of the plane at the apex of the chief Dipapa's house, and the pilot's seat on the veranda. There is the extraordinary church which Dalwood comes across. Again he sees it at first as a joke, but ends by asking "Is this what they mean by horror?" (p. 93). There is the black Jesus/white Jesus motif. The black ebony Jesus is crucified on his ebony plane in the place in the church where the altar should have been. The white Jesus is pointedly referred to in the census taking and the three good men reference. Benoni makes the real link: "Taubada", I said, "there was a star. Taubada, is that true? There was a star" (p. 96). It is Benoni who persists in bringing up the star-machine stories despite Cawdor's statement that there are no people in the stars. It is only when Benoni comes with six other witnesses that Cawdor really reacts: 'It was very extraordinary to see Misa Kodo's face. What was in his face was like joy' (p. 105). Benoni's monologue, which immediately precedes Dalwood's account of the reading of *The Conquest of Mexico*, ends 'He stood by the table looking down at us, with his eyes wide and his face moved and dark, and he said those words as if he believed what he said. "My very great thanks" (p. 107).

Cawdor's joy is in part the sudden flash of connection which draws together fragments of perception. In his first patrol book entry, significantly the only one which is personal and introspective in style, Cawdor thinks about the whole history of the island, geographical and human. He thinks of the island as simply digesting people. 'So many visitants coming, none that anyone knows of ever driven away' (p. 30). 'It was all in the scheme of things', he thinks later, and concludes 'Keep thinking about time, vast stretches of time, so as not to think: "What about me?" Where was I when the mountains came out of the sea. Seize hold of that moment, concentrate on it, meditate on it. Then I know where I stand with time and it doesn't matter' (pp. 31-2). The passage from *The Conquest of Mexico* gives Cawdor the sense of the cyclic nature of things, time endlessly repeating itself, and so ravelling out into no-time. The passage itself refers to prophecies about the second coming of Quetzalcoatl, the Aztec god of the air. In his first incarnation he was tall in stature, with a white skin, long dark hair and a slowing beard, although his representation in the great temple gives him ebon features. Quetzalcoatl was a great benefactor, instructing the natives in the use of metals,

agriculture, and the arts of government. Under him the earth seemed with fruits and flowers, without the pain of culture. The air was filled with intoxicating perfumes and the sweet melody of birds. This, says Prescott, was the golden age. The actual passage Cawdor marks refers to strange apparitions in the heavens, particularly an extraordinary light which 'seemed thickly powdered with stars' (p. 110).

The millennium of the Aztecs and the millennium of the islanders fuse in Cawdor's mind. Cawdor is not involved in the cargo-cult uprising in a physical sense, but he can be seen to be guilty, as the catechism of Osana at the end of the novel suggests. He too has felt the power of that longing. He too has been 'taken over' as the concluding passage of the novel, translated from Kiriwinian, suggests: "My house is echoing with the footsteps of the visitor, and the person who lived there before is dying. That person is bleeding. My house is bleeding to death" (p. 189). It is a terrible ending, yet the last words Cawdor writes are on the fly-leaf of *The Conquest of Mexico*. They include a Kiriwinian version of Julian of Norwich's 'Al shal be wel and al shal be wel and al manner of thyng shal be wele'. The preceding phrase is 'Synne is behovabil' ('behovely' in Eliot's 'Little Gidding' section of *Four Quartets*), i.e. 'able to be made use of or benefit'.

The Julian of Norwich words can be seen as terrible irony, but they can also imply acceptance. Cawdor is breaking, fragmenting, throughout the novel. The final disintegration comes with the news of the death of his friend Manson, presumably taken by sharks. "It's the watch I can't get over", Alistair said. "The watch ticking away on the beach, when Jack was — all in bits" (p. 181). Time goes on while the individual life has stopped. It is this which finally makes Cawdor feel he is going mad. But there is one rescue or salvation left, to become one with the universe.

The machine did not come from the stars to rescue Cawdor, so he became the stars, part of the cosmic dance. While his last written words, as translated by Osana, are 'every kind of thing will be good' (p. 188), his last spoken words are 'I saw, Timi, I saw. Down the tunnel. My body. Atoms. Stars' (p. 185). And, at the very end, 'I can never die' (p. 186).

In *To the Islands* Heriot has a magnificently apocalyptic image of destruction as he talks to Rusty in the seventh chapter. He says that if he had the strength he would break the cliffs down to boulders, stones, pebbles, molecules, atoms; and even the atoms, which mirror the solar system, he would break. 'Well go on', says Rusty, 'finish your bloody breaking.' 'And what if that should be God? ... The stone I killed him with was full of God', replies Heriot (pp. 148-9).

In *Tourmaline* the Law has a sudden vision of man's being a disease of God; man's very existence has wounded God and will perhaps kill him. Tom Spring replies: 'Everything [is sacred]. Because nothing exists that

isn't part of his body' (p. 161) and a little later affirms 'Dying's not serious. Everything's indestructible. If God can die, he'll die in glory. Watch out for the flowers on his grave' (p. 152).

Cawdor's last statements can be taken as a reconciliation of the pain and guilt Heriot and the Law sometimes feel, and the affirmation of Tom Spring. But acceptance of one's simultaneous insignificance and indestructibility is one thing. To will the process of finally belonging is another. It is only in death that Cawdor belongs; as Sayam says, looking at his body 'so covered with dried blood that it was unrecognizable as the body of a European': 'Now he is a black man true' (p. 187).

Crispin Clare, in *The Girl Green as Elderflower*, is the resurrection of Cawdor, in fictional and mystical forms. In *Pilgrims*, whose very form reflects the fragmentation of the central character, the personal shame, humiliation, anguish, and loss experienced by Cawdor are analogous to the communal disintegration of the islanders, on Kaga many years before and on Kailuana in the time present of the novel. Both movements of disintegration are countered, at the last, by personal and communal integration. The personal comes out most clearly in the relationship between Macdonnell and Naibusu, and in the transformation, the initiation into manhood, of Dalwood. The communal is apparent in the restoration of law, order and harmony in the villages effected by Benoni, the rightful heir to Dipapa. Benoni in fact says to Saliba in the midst of the cargo cult turbulence: 'O all will be well' (p. 152). Death (of Cawdor, Metusela, Dipapa) makes new life possible, as Heriot's departure revitalizes the mission in *To the Islands*.

With *The Girl Green as Elderflower* form also reflects meaning, but here the process is integration, regeneration. Clare does not go down the tunnel to become atoms, stars, but emerges from 'his hole, his pit, his wolf-pit' from which he has seen the face of the green god, formed out of intertwining leaves, 'invulnerably amused'.³ In form the novel is a marvellous intertwining and fusion of pagan and Christian, folk-lore past and Suffolk present, as characters from Clare's world weave themselves into the three tales which are not so much interpolations as natural (or perhaps mystical) growths from Clare's healing process. Clare (although this is putting it very simplistically) becomes at one with the Suffolk community (past and present) and landscape. He faces his own immediate personal past, so like Cawdor's, and goes back in time to the medieval roots of his heritage, his psychic past. By recreating that heritage and fusing it with the present, he does not destroy time, but assents to eternal recurrence. He becomes himself the principle of

creativity as the time present of the novel moves from winter to summer. If *Vivants* is a sky novel, this is an earth one, with its wonderfully evocative images of the seasonally changing Suffolk landscape. In *Vivants* the underworld sequence, significant though it is, is not developed. In *The Girl Green as Elderflower*, the underworld, or otherworld, whether it is the country under the sea or the country under the earth or the country under the conscious self, is finally the source of life, and of a life which can accommodate death. When the Alsatian eats the magnificent pheasant Clare can now take this with calm (unlike Heriot): 'It was the way of the green God' (p. 68). Green becomes white. The green buds of the elder break into white blossom. That moment, when life is poised between edenic freshness and innocence and the white flowering which implicitly presages maturity and death has no permanence, except in art, and except in the fact that out of the white will come again the green.

Early in the novel Clare looks at the marks of the glasses on the bar 'the circles-on-circles stamped in drying beer over the shining wood of the bar. So inside atoms. So in all space. The everlasting terror of a process without term' (p. 32). That everlasting terror becomes joyous acceptance. The green girl of the third story Clare writes grows old and dies, having become elder-white, but as she dies into her eyes 'there seemed to come the paradox of a green flush' (p. 196). The paradox of the green flush is given imaginative representation in the three green girls of the present: the elfin, sprite-like child Amabel, the unnamed young woman of mysterious origins who re-enacts the honouring of St Martin (himself a fusion of pagan Celtic and early Christian) and the mature Alicia whose eyes, at the very end of the novel, are flecked with green. (Alicia too is an artist, and the painting of hers described at the beginning of the novel is an emblem not only of seasonal promise but of the significance of art as creation.)

The transformation motifs are rich and suggestively intertwined. There is, for example, the use of the Tarot pack, itself, like the stories, medieval in origin and containing both pagan and Christian associations. When Clare goes up to Martlets from his cottage early in the novel Amabel has five Tarot cards arranged in a cross to predict his future. On the left is the Hanging, or (in Stow's novel as in the English version of Marseille pack) Hanged Man. The card at this stage represents only terror to Clare's subconscious mind which manifests itself in the Ouija board communication which is in Kiriwinian and includes words from the concluding passage of *Vivants* (A katoula, 'I am sick' and kaliga 'to die or faint', here the latter sense). Clare collapses, but the

Tarot card will not go away. The others scattered on the floor are face down except for the twelfth.

In the April section Clare finds the card of the Fool or Wild Man, the zero card in his pocket. It is claimed by one of this novel's visitants, Matthew Perry (a chameleon like figure in the Clare story and in the tales, at times the wild man from the country under the sea, at times the Wandering Jew, another of the names of the zero card). Perry says to Clare 'You also have a card. I'll tell you some day what it is' (p. 72). In the May section Perry posts the Hanging Man card to Clare, whose first reaction is horror. But when he turns the card over on the back is written 'Your card = *Resurrection*' (p. 108).

This of course is thoroughly within the complex mystical traditions of the Tarot pack. Man hangs as an upside down triangle symbolizing that his spiritual values are in chaos but his hair and the few shoots of green grass imply that life can come out of this virtual death. It is the Judas card but also the resurrection card, as the elder is claimed to be the tree Judas hanged himself on, but also the tree on which Christ was nailed. Clare has already imaginatively incorporated the hanging man motif in the tale 'Concerning a wild man caught in the sea'. Now he accepts his personal past, the tarot card with its own 'paradox of a green flush'.

Acceptance and faith are variously depicted in the novel. The Christian affirmation comes through the priest figure who actually assumes his contemporary name at the very end of the last of the three stories 'Concerning a boy and a girl emerging from the earth'.

'I, even I, have known a prodigy and a marvel, and I have wept for two children, and feared in their flight to see an image of my own. Nevertheless I did not despair, for them or for myself, knowing that even in their wandering they rested still in reach of God's hand. For no man is lost, no man goes astray in God's garden; which is here, which is now, which is tomorrow, which is always, time and time again... This I believe and must', said Jacques Mounour, 'I believe, and must.' (p. 136)

Clare's affirmation is in the short concluding section 'June', and it is tripartite. He dreams of three of the green girl manifestations, the last of whom, from St Martin's land, speaks in Kiriwinian. Clare does not metaphorically turn away his face but is about to approach her. Next he tells Alicia of the marvellous thing he saw: eight white doves 'going crazy over the big elder, ice-white against yellowish-white' (p. 141). (Alicia says she'll think about painting it, and refers to the elder as a favourite of Constable's.) Clare's last act is to toast 'seely', that is blessed and holy, Suffolk.

The new life for Clare comes not through death, nor through the coming of the millennium. He does not need to be rescued because Suffolk and its visitants from other worlds have, through his own creative and recreative efforts, brought him home. The Green god, pagan and Christian, has manifested himself in and around Clare. Heriot saw Tourmaline's garden as the sky. Clare sees god's garden here, now, on this earth, continually recreating itself in the vision of white doves against elder-blossom. So the rescue, withheld from Tourmaline, denied in life to Cawdor, does finally take place. The 'Cosmic Symbolical Desert'¹⁰ has blossomed at last.

<i>Islands</i>	58	- <i>Days</i>
<i>Morguehouse</i>	65	- <i>See White</i>
<i>Tourmaline</i>	73	
<i>Vigilante</i>	77	78 - <i>See</i>
<i>Elderflower</i>	80	

NOTES

1. See Kenneth G. Burridge, *New Heaven, New Earth* (Oxford, 1969), p. 165.
2. Randolph Stow, *A Harvested Land* (London, 1956), p. 10.
3. Randolph Stow, *To the Islands* (London, 1958), p. 62. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.
4. John B. Beason, 'Heriot's literary allusions in Randolph Stow's *To the Islands*', *Southerly*, 35 (1975), 168-77 (p. 176).
5. Two comparatively recent publications are: Helen Tiffin, 'Tourmaline and the Tao Te Ching', in *Studies in the Recent Australian Novel*, edited by K.G. Hamilton (St Lucia, Queensland, 1978); and Paul D. Higginbotham, 'Honour the Single Soul: Randolph Stow and His Novels', *Southerly*, 38 (1978), 378-92.
6. Randolph Stow, *Tourmaline* (London, 1965), p. 11. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.
7. Randolph Stow, *Vigilante* (London, 1979), p. 126. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.
8. W.H. Prescott, *The Conquest of Mexico* (London: Everyman's Library, 1909) I, 338.
9. Randolph Stow, *The Girl Green as Elderflower* (London, 1980), p. 82. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.
10. Randolph Stow, *Midwife* (London, 1967), p. 93.

Thomas Shapcott

CLEANING OUT THE ANNEXE

Batignano, Il Convento

(i)

The chapel with ordinary sky roof and camomile paths
cannot be cleaned. No spiders yet
but watch for vipers. Once, we explored the vestry.
It is an annexe now. How to imagine the lost chapel?

(ii)

Tomorrow the young singers from London return
another summer of sun and Dido. Dust to be struck up
like a tarantella of spidershells. Rotting costumes
to be claimed from the floor.

Last year ended a rush,
bus, shouting, and then this. Nothing moves here
except damp. That snuffled upwards. Dust
weighted the spidershells down.

(iii)

Each ten minutes I rush out, paste wracked. Ordinary air
douses me. The panic is old alarm wiring along corridors.
Go away. Each time I forget about the dust; was it
always there? How did spiders intrude?

I return to work the ideal of clean space
beginning at corners.

Like moonscapes of surf, dust curls back over.

(iv)

Box of matches, Grosseto postcard curling its dry tongue,
drawers I cram with lace, made-up castoffs, royal cardboard
and the african straw masks for witches. *Go away.*
that sounds dusty now, theatrical.

A full year. I sweep buttons, party corks.

I must believe in cleaning. I am closed off.
Dust makes inefficient paste, good for nothing.

(v)

Nothing to think
nothing to remember
no person I have known, the masks become straw nothings
the programmes list nothing, names less imaginary than olive trees.
The imprint of rush
takes time
and will not willingly be tidied. We are not all paste.
I am cleaning out nothing.

(vi)

Go away.
I am working go away go
to the upstairs gallery out along the loggia
there is a new tiled bathroom go there
go far off go to the olive grove far off, to those last
thickets past the cellar hencoops go far off there is dust here
it clogs nostrils to clay
it filters my eyes to spider shells
killing my tongue I taste nothing I see through broken panes
I hear avalanches of memories melt into rising damp
the chapel roof is sky
I have walls discoloured by too much sky that dark paste
the storms fell silent
the vandals came they left programmes and straw faces
ripping and tearing, soiling walls, curling up neighbour cities
non-sound is not silence
what it means is silence retreats go away
I hear you breathing I will not remember
tomorrow another crowd of young singers one of us
will go away I am dust in your way I hear your breathing
you pick camomile through the door the chapel has no roof
my damp fingers smell everything I hear witch fingers
the orchestra thrumming you turn your straw face to others
on your knees this programme not my name
the chapel annexes silence eardrums finger you
your breathing not my name
my moonscape pulse curls over, not my name
surf, breakers, imprint of rush

measuring my throat and not willing to be paste
not able to go away.

Alison Croggan

TEIRESIAS

You wouldn't read about it:
all the women in black and the flames like dragons
hissing down on the broken roof and Oedipus
raining blood from his eyes like terrible tears
and his mother and wife in the bedroom hanging herself —

I saw it coming, but no one listened, of course:
you can't cheat fate, I said, and those gods are buggers
if you try to outwit them — but with his usual hubris
Oedipus told me to shut my mouth unless I was going to say
something cheerful, so I just went away, saying
you can wander in the desert by yourself, your majesty —
you can't say much to arrogance like that.

Not that I don't feel sorry for him. He wasn't bad,
a good king and usually fair, except when the famines
and starving people got to him. And he could have taken
Jocasta's way, shrugged the whole thing off his shoulders —
still, there's no satisfaction in being right. You can't say
'I told you so' to a man like that.

Bernice Lever

ON HAVING LOVERS

'On' being the crucial word
'cause mostly it's 'off',
being put off, rained-out, postponed,
when spouse or previous lover or only mother
enters the warming-up pit,
up-staged, out-positioned, delayed,
until they can fit you in,
into their dug-out,
never a 'home' game, always playing
at the visiting town.

Does one have an 'in' with a lover,
or even favourable 'innings',
yet never a home run,
no matter how many times
you knock the ball out of the park.

Lovers are contagious, an addictive sport,
one leads to another, a strike-out,
a new lover helps you
over the last one, a no-hitter,
there seems no cure,
only withdrawal symptoms —
no preventive medicine,
only The pill, just more
of the same bad medicine
repeating in your stomachs,
and the cold hollowness
with 'good-bye' on your lips,

when your batting average is down
when you can't quite cheer
or wish your lover 'farewell',
as you're always sliding
towards base, never quite touching,
so who's the umpire?
and who's keeping score,
or even the players straight
and waving pennants for the winning side?
but players run for the highest pay,
not for team loyalty.
Even the playing field has fake turf today.

M.L. Kelly

DREAMER IN LIMBO

*For such defect and for no other offence
We are lost, and only in so far amerced
That without hope we languish in suspense.*

Dante, The Inferno, Canto IV

I.
The memory hangs
on the rim of her mind:

at the bottom of the dream lies
debris, half-buried — sedimented wishes,
random waste, desolate remains
of uncompleted acts and lives stopped short
in the flow of desire's
sweet stream from source
to mouth and back again
that makes the dream come round
and wears down the edges
of the rocks that made them
stumble and fall, mid-stream,
when all they wanted was just once
to see it to the end.

II.

Dante's limbo, this day —
dreamt time and space
without motion, without limit
without walls to define
without windows to see
beyond, the eyes turned
inside out, suspended
like colourless corpuscles
in the blood's clear liquid.

There pain is not sharp but dull,
not the message but the medium in which
vague clouds hang high and cool
across the mind while farther down
the fevered winds lie still
caught in the dream's mute chill.
There living wishes are instantly frozen
like ice-age dinosaurs with undigested
green leaves forever suspended in the hollows
of their mouths and bellies perpetually
awaiting the warm breadth
of a new age in which
to live and move
and have their being.

NOCTURNE

Autumn in the Cotswolds.
Brown-tipped ivy threads its way
Through the stones of the dry wall
That follows the road.
A flock of white gulls pecks
In a bronze field; i wonder
When they're going back to sea.
Two old women behind me on the bus
Count off their dead
Friends like sheep over fences before sleep.
Out there they safely graze, they pass me by,
Tufts of clouds against a sky of green.

Gold leaves line the streets of Oxford.
The seamless gleam of bright young faces
Makes me long for winter's dim withering.
The strangling vine, the wool pulled
Over the eyes, one last time to sink
Deep in dreamless, stone cold sleep.

Family Chronicles: The novels of Maurice Gee

Maurice Gee, the New Zealand novelist, is not a prolific writer; during some twenty years he has produced only a handful of novels and one collection of short stories. Nor, it seems true to say, has he been widely known outside his own country. All his novels have been published in England first, but even there, where New Zealand writers have sometimes managed to establish a firm reputation whilst remaining prophets in their own land, his work has attracted no wide-spread attention.

Perhaps one reason for this neglect has been that his novels always seem to have a rather restricted spectrum of interest in their resolute concentration upon New Zealanders living in New Zealand, all of them apparently preoccupied with specifically New Zealand concerns. His first novel, *The Big Season* (1962), for example, is mainly devoted to criticising one of the cherished ideals of New Zealand life. An English newspaper reviewing it at the time it was published wrote that 'it is about a man's rebellion against the clean-limbed, rugger-club values of New Zealand suburban life'.

This is, at best, only a half-truth: it is much truer to describe *The Big Season* as a *bildungsroman* which traces the growth to maturity of Rob Andrews, the young protagonist. A *bildungsroman* then, certainly, but one that does, nevertheless, deal with a fairly limited field of interest. The crucial stage in Rob Andrews' youthful development is reached when he finally rebels against the cult of rugby-football, in Wainui, the small town where he lives, by stubbornly refusing to play in the team's next match in what promises to be their big season. 'I think you've slapped this town in the face', his father, one of the club's most fervent supporters, shouts at him:

Rob lost his temper then.

'The town', he cried, 'what do you mean by the town? What you really mean is

you and all your coppers. You want to use me and the rest of us to keep some bloody stupid tin cup for you so you can all gather round it and pat yourselves on the back and say what a great little footballing town you live in. God, you're like a bunch of kids! Why don't you grow up?'¹

This criticism of the cult of rugby in New Zealand with its attendant belief in the virtues of clean tackling and hard drinking cannot seem other than rather small beer for the reader outside this closed-in world. And although the way in which support of the local team becomes almost a complete way of life to its followers is indeed vividly and convincingly illustrated in *The Big Season*, one misses in this novel the sense of gruelling, physical strain, the sweat and the whole feel of the game itself so starkly conveyed in David Storey's *This Sporting Life*, for example.

If the novel in the main centres upon the local football ground, it also however marks an entry into another arena. Mr Andrews is an ardent supporter of the team — and a heavily repressive father; his son's action not only lets the side down, it therefore also marks a rebellion against the restraints of the family. At the end of the novel Rob has rejected his home and his family and has no longer any place in the town where he has spent all his youth. Like so many other protagonists in the *bildungsroman* he stands on the threshold of a new life, but even here one can note a restriction of interest. He too will no longer serve. Stephen Dedalus leaves Ireland to go into exile to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge, what he magniloquently calls, the uncreated conscience of his race; Paul Morel puts Bestwood and the darkness of death behind him to follow his destiny into the light; Rob Andrews leaves Wainui to move to Auckland. The flight of the godwit, so important in Robin Hyde's novel and covering such vast distances, for him is one that is kept well within the shores of New Zealand.

Donald Pinnock, the main character of *A Special Flower* (1965), Maurice Gee's next novel, is nearing staid and sober middle-age, and is, on the face of it, an unlikely enough choice to play the same rebellious role as the young Rob Andrews. He is unmarried, has always been a devoted son and lives at home with his mother in a house which is the epitome of middle-class respectability and of all the virtues of gentility. Donald, however, is attracted to Coralie and finally tells his mother that he has decided to marry her. Coralie is impulsive, loud, but above all 'vulgar', the antithesis of everything that Mrs Pinnock represents.

After the wedding Mrs Pinnock and her married daughter, Jean, who is cast in the same middle class mould as her mother, survey the situation:

'Mother.'

The tremble in her voice annoyed Mrs Pinnock. She felt contemptuous. Jean was not going to be much help.

'Mother, I can't believe it.'

Mrs Pinnock turned and walked across the veranda. Her feet made even drum-taps on the wood. 'Things are very far from over yet', she said.²

And indeed they are not. The newly-married couple make their home with Mrs Pinnock and, as a — fairly predictable — consequence, the conflict between the two ways of life takes on an ever-greater momentum.

A New Zealand reader familiar with the values, social mores and general middle-class way of life represented by Mrs Pinnock will presumably note time and again a criticism of this that strikes directly home and rings true. But the book gives another echo, equally loud. Readers of E.M. Forster's early novels with their array of snobbish, genteel, frigidly repressive, middle-class characters will note a strong family likeness, particularly with the Herritons of *Where Angels Fear to Tread*. Mrs Herriton's values are similarly challenged by the vulgar, loud, warm-blooded Lilia and the mésalliance she contracts. Forster's early fiction also has a very explicit message, the inevitably quoted 'only connect', but whereas in Forster, this explicitness is made the basis for a play of subtle social comedy and a delicately nuanced satirical wit which give a density of texture to his novels, the message of *A Special Flower*, stripped of this dimension, becomes a very bald and direct one.

A scene during which Coralie's mother visits the Pinnocks and a favourite vase of Mrs Pinnock's is accidentally broken can perhaps sufficiently indicate how prominent this quality is in the novel:

She looked admiringly at the coffee-table where a graceful Venetian-glass vase with paper flowers in it stood beside a plaster dog. ... Coralie, in control, had insisted on having it on the table: a vase should hold flowers, she said, not be stuck away in a corner. Mrs Pinnock hated to see it out as though it were some ordinary thing, hated the cheap flowers and the vulgar dog... (SF, p. 35)

Calmly, with a calm on which she had space to congratulate herself, she saw that at this moment her Venetian glass was to be broken. It did not pain her. The actual destruction now seemed unimportant. Had not destruction been going on all through this evening, all through this year? The vase had been breaking, with a sharp sound like the cracking of ice, ever since Coralie had entered this house. (SF, p. 42)

The struggle between Mrs Pinnock and Coralie for possession of

Donald is not really brought to any conclusion. He dies very suddenly of a heart-attack and Coralie has moved out; only however, at the end of the novel, to be invited to return by Mrs Pinnock and her daughter, Jean. In the closing pages Jean asks Coralie:

'But can you understand I'm glad you came back?' ... For a moment she could not carry on. Then she brought words out in a rush. 'And because there's life in you and very little in me and I must try to understand.' (SF, pp 188-9)

And Mrs Pinnock is left with the reflection that 'really, this business of Coralie shows there are still areas of freedom in life' (SF, p. 192).

The Big Season and *A Special Flower*; Rob Andrews and Donald Pinnock; the rejection of the cult of athletic prowess, and criticism of middle-class conventionality; two utterly different persons and two widely diverse aspects of life within New Zealand. Yet common to both of these novels is that they have as their main character a person who is completely at odds with parental values and in rebellion against the family. Pressure to remain within the enclave of the family and to respect unquestioningly the restraints and strict confinement it imposes may take different shapes, the desire to dominate and repress may be exerted through many different channels, but in this fundamental respect there is little if anything to choose between Mr Andrews and Mrs Pinnock. In fact the chief interest of these two early novels is that one can observe in them Maurice Gee moving, slowly and uncertainly, into an area that since then his fiction has chiefly concentrated upon — that of personal relationships, their strain, their subtle cruelty even their savagery, all of them conducted within the structure and confines provided by the nuclear family. The territory has been mapped out in *The Big Season* and *A Special Flower*; from now on it is explored with an increasing degree of skill, subtlety and insight.

* * *

In the light of Mrs Pinnock's complacent reflection that there are still areas of freedom in life, the very title of *In My Father's Den* (1972) acquires a deeply ironical significance. Paul Prior, the narrator, remarks of his father at the beginning of the novel that 'his years of manhood were a struggle for privacy — no less desperate for being secret — first from his housekeeper sister, Jane, then from my mother'. Paul's own struggle as a boy and as an adolescent is also a desperate attempt to be free from his mother. He succeeds in breaking free of her influence when he finds

his father's den, a refuge he has established for himself in a shed in the garden. Here Paul is allowed to spend his time lost in his reading, here, and here only, he feels safely cut off from the world that contains his mother and everything she represents — in particular, her Presbyterianism, 'grim and fundamental' (FD, p. 14). Mrs Pinnock's life was conducted according to a rigid code of middle-class gentility and convention; 'the rules of conduct that governed (Mrs Prior's) life were moral though she believed them religious ... the demon of godliness would not let her rest' (FD, pp. 18-20).

From the start of *In My Father's Den*, then, one can discern the outline of the pattern of significance so frequently drawn in Gee's novels. It is one that centres upon the family — increasingly so as his work develops. But contained within the circle of these relationships, and eventually disrupting it, are issues that embrace life in New Zealand society as a whole — both past and present. The fiercely puritanical morality of Paul's mother is a key-element in the novel, it is a decisive influence in the upbringing of her family, and it has also played an essential role in the formation of New Zealand society. As Keith Sinclair in *A History of New Zealand* remarks: 'the moral attitudes of society were moulded ... by puritanical forms of Christianity and by the evangelism which permeated most Christian churches last century.'

The remark can also cast light on the significance of the narrative structure adopted for this book. It opens by quoting a newspaper account dated 13 May 1969, recording the discovery of the strangled body of Celia Inverarity, a seventeen year old girl. Suspicion at once falls upon Paul Prior, forty-one years old, the murdered girl's teacher of English, and the last person known to have seen her alive. Both his parents are dead and he lives alone in their house, spending much of his free time in his father's den. Six days elapse before the crime is finally solved and it is these days that form the core of the novel. This is not, however, an encapsulated period of time, but it rather serves as a spring-board from which Paul, convinced that somewhere there he will find the key to the present, plunges into the depths of his past. In order to follow him, the narrative structure is divided into sections which move back and forth between present and past.

Paul has a brother living in the town and, whereas Paul believes that he has succeeded in liberating himself from his background, Andrew has remained devoted to his mother's memory. Always fiercely censorious of Paul, he has observed Celia on her frequent visits to his brother and, convinced that Paul is desecrating everything that his mother stood for,

he murders her. Paul finally discovers the truth, and his brother is arrested.

It will be clear from this account that the novel has much of the suspense of the detective story and possibly some of its sensationalism as well. But, more important, not only is the murderer finally tracked down, Paul also reaches a clearer insight into the salient features of the past that have moulded his life into its present shape. He has freed himself from his family, from his mother and from everything she represents — or so he has confidently believed. Now, looking back, he describes his childhood to Celia:

'I got rid of God when I was ten or eleven, by my own efforts ... But ever since then — I've been incomplete. I've got this sense of being hollow. I keep shifting from thing to thing. That's why I have to have a den. To stop me being completely slippery. Lightweight.'

I listened to this confession with dismay. I had never questioned my identity; but nor had I made any attempt to recognize it. Why should I do it now? ...

I described a Presbyterian upbringing. Its strictness was something I had managed to forget; so now I was awed by the number of my secular choices that echoed lessons taken in those first ten years. My libertarian habits, it seemed, were Presbyterian after all, by simple inversion. Everything took its tone from Mother. (FD, p. 131)

Wordsworth believed that shades of the prison-house begin to close upon the growing boy; Paul's boyhood, on the contrary, from the very beginning was spent in a prison watched over by his mother. The den thought of for so long as a safe boyhood refuge turns out, ironically, to be a place of family bondage for the adult as well.

Any summary of the book does it less than justice for one of its major achievements lies in the self-description of Paul Prior whose consciousness and awareness is the medium through which the narrative is told. It is an analysis and characterisation which in its considerable subtlety and economy anticipates the even greater achievement of Gee's later novel, *Phumb*. Moreover, although the story is narrated by Paul in the first person, and although it is through his eyes the reader sees the whole story, nevertheless he is ironically placed and distanced throughout. Paul is not an impartial witness. He reaches an understanding of his past and its links with the present — so too does the reader; but the reader also gains an even clearer insight into Paul himself. What remains in doubt, however, is the extent to which *he* is fully aware that his past has rendered him an emotional cripple in the present and that it is, in the last analysis, his life that is really responsible for Celia's death. The finely

muted epilogue contains in fact the sharpest stroke of irony in the whole book:

I live in a house by the sea in Nelson Province. It's here I've written this story – cultivating my garden, so to speak. It does not surprise me that what began as the story of Celia's death should have become the story of my life. What could be more natural?

I mourn Celia now and then. But what I really mourn is my books. My poor, burned books. I have orders placed all over the country. The postman curses me.

In his next novel, *Games of Choice* (1976), Maurice Gee does not follow the firmly demarcated story-line with its clear sequence of chronological events that characterises his previous fiction. The process by which Paul Prior examines his past is one that is set in train by events outside himself; in *Games of Choice*, however, Kingsley Pratt's habit of continually mulling over the past is an integral part of his personality. Paul is forced to remember in order to uncover the truth of the present; Kingsley Pratt indulges in introspection so as to veil the truth from himself. The result is a closely-woven texture which, instead of a story, really consists of a description of a family situation or state of affairs – affairs in all senses of the word.

The family, consisting of Kingsley, his wife, Alison, their two teenage children, Malcolm and Miranda, and Kingsley's father, now retired and living in a garden shack that has been fitted up as a home for him, are assembled for the Christmas holiday. Both Kingsley's major characteristic and the significance of the novel's title are made clear near the beginning where Kingsley vows to himself that on this Christmas morning at least he will use 'every trick he knew to keep himself from any sort of backward glance at his life. That could only lead to the game of choices, to the dreaming of other ways'.¹ The vow, however, is difficult to keep, Kingsley's marriage is a failure, and has been so for years. A few days later, Alison finally leaves him.

Despite the fact, however, that this does bring about a major change in the family, it is not this marriage relationship that the novel focuses upon. As with the rest of Gee's fiction, the centre of interest remains largely fixed upon that between parent and child. The focus, then, remains the same, but the viewpoint has changed. Time has moved on – and Maurice Gee with it. Now the main character is himself a father, and it is from this new perspective that our conception of the family relationships chronicled in *Games of Choice* is governed.

The times have also changed in another sense; Miranda is both her

father's daughter and a child of the late 1960s in general. In the past year she tells her father:

She had joined in the burning of an American flag and picketed the offices of the security police; she had helped produce a satirical broadsheet, she had been to pot parties and tried mixed flatting, tried yoga, a macrobiotic diet, and (only once) LSD. (GC, p. 26)

After the home breaks up, she also moves out with the man with whom she is having her current affair.

Malcolm's rebellion against the family takes an opposite course; he too leaves home, but to go into the army as a volunteer, to become what his father bitterly describes as 'a man-butcher'.

Summarized thus, *Games of Choice* is reduced to a conventional account in a New Zealand setting of that international phenomenon 'the generation gap', and there is, in fact, one place in the novel where Kingsley does use the term. 'It seemed there were generation gaps wherever one looked. He felt relief as the jargon clouded his thought. There was no longer any point in thinking clearly' (GC, p. 62). But the novel really belies this since *Games of Choice* is not, in fact, a study of an oppressive parent trying, in vain, to quell his children's rebellion. On the contrary the reader gradually becomes aware — as Kingsley does too — that beneath all the dissension and conflict the children still retain much sympathy and affection for their father and that these feelings are reciprocated. The novel closes with Kingsley recognizing clearly at last that Malcolm and Miranda are now individuals with their own lives to lead — and accepting, equally clearly, that this will be done outside the family:

He walked down to the river. In his mind he wrote to Miranda: *Miranda, I love you. Be happy ...* and to Malcolm: *Malcolm, Be happy, be kind.* He was moved almost to open speech by his love for them and knew that they would find no use for it.... He walked up the line of the iron fence and into the shade of the walnut tree. They would always cause him pain, the children, and fill him with a love that could not be spoken, yet they were as acceptable to him as the tree itself. Beyond the emotions they caused him they were neutral, firm in their places. (GC, pp. 163-4)

It is Maurice Gee's novels that are the most significant part of his writing and his short stories are really best seen as supplementary to these. There is, for example, an episode in a short story which casts much light on the parent-child relationship depicted in *Games of Choice*. It is also an episode which clearly has some marked degree of significance for

Gee since it is later elaborated into the main situation of another story, 'A Glorious Morning, Comrade' which, in turn, is also the title-piece of the whole volume of short stories first published in 1975.

At the end of the story, 'A Retired Life', the main character, Cliff Poulson, is walking one evening on the beach near his home when he is passed by an old man who has clearly escaped for a time from the care of his two middle-aged daughters. Then he notices the two women running in pursuit of their father in order to catch him and take him back home:

Poor bitches, he thought, watching them catch Mr Webb. They brought him back past Cliff; sturdy figures, supporting the old man so that his feet only touched the sand lightly. The tender sounds they made died away.

'Naughty boy. Running away from the ones who love him.'

The old man must be wet, Cliff thought. He'd catch pneumonia.⁵

Running away from the ones who love them; it would be difficult to find a phrase which — *mutatis mutandis* — more accurately characterises the family situation at the end of *Games of Choice*, and moreover, to find one which more strongly suggests many of the paradoxes — painful or otherwise — which can surround the whole relationship between children and parents as the child grows up and approaches adult independence. In a sense it is this essential paradox which lies at the very heart of all the relationships between parents and children dealt with in Gee's novels, even in the earlier ones. *Games of Choice*, however, ends on a markedly optimistic note: the bonds of the family have been snapped — the ties of affection remain.

* * *

It seems appropriate enough that at least part of the fascination derived from reading *Plumb* can be found in tracing its family likeness to the rest of Gee's fiction. Not all of these likenesses are explored in depth, but even so, they are established with a very sure economy of touch. Moreover, by an unfailingly firm control of material these similarities are all made to contribute to the major concerns of the novel — the establishment of George Plumb's character, the exploration of the factors in the past that have made him what he is in the present, and finally, the way in which these have crucially affected his relationship with his children.

As is the case with *In My Father's Den*, many of the events are viewed in retrospect and are clarified by this perspective. Like Kingsley Pratt, Plumb too is a father, but a much older one. In his eighties when the

novel opens, all of his children are now grown up and have established families of their own. His wife, Edie, has been dead for many years, but in recalling her, the tenderness aroused by her memory does not blind him to a flaw in her character: 'gentility had been Edie's vice. And I thought, gentility is the enemy of life, it gets in the way of natural response.' Plumb thinks of his wife; the reader recalls *A Special Flower*. He had first noticed her when he was playing cricket. Sport has played a part in Plumb's life as it did in Rob Andrews's, but its role is a rather different one: 'Let me say now, I have always been impatient of those who sneer at sport. Nothing better promotes deep and free breathing, which is the basis of health' (*P*, p. 16).

There is, however, another similarity between *Plumb* and *In My Father's Den*. Presbyterianism is a key-factor in both novels. In the earlier, Presbyterianism, although a formative influence in Paul's life through his mother, is, nevertheless, presented entirely from his point of view, and we are never allowed into her consciousness to see things from this vantage-point. After listening to his brother, who has remained steadfastly within the fold of the church, preaching at him, Paul 'started to work up a rage. That cretin, I thought, that half-man, that self-castrated, mother-worshipping, obscurantist, priestly, wowser prick. What a mind!' (*FD*, p. 146). In *Plumb* we are taken inside that mind and follow its working. Paul is an inverted Presbyterian; in *Plumb* the balance is righted.

George Plumb, in the early part of the book, joins the Presbyterian church and then becomes a minister of it. The step is one that is taken only after much mental anguish, soul-searching and spiritual turmoil. The ceaseless struggle of the nonconformist with his conscience which Plumb's life presents at this stage, the way in which he and his wife are incessantly engaged in the struggle of 'mapping out our lives under God' (*P*, p. 23), their burning conviction that every thought, word and deed has a deeper significance — that every act is 'a spiritual act, an act of praise' (*P*, p. 13), that all things are performed in the sight of the Lord and are judged accordingly; all these processes are presented with great insight and sympathetic understanding. In its comprehension of the working of the puritan conscience it does not seem entirely unjustified to place this early part of the book beside, for example, Bunyan in the tradition of English nonconformist writing or, say, Hawthorne in that of New England puritanism.

In order to describe this early stage of Plumb's life, Gee has drawn upon, as he states in an 'author's note', the writings of his own grand-

parents, James and Florence Chapple, to whose memory it is dedicated. The note is worth quoting since it brings out more clearly than anywhere else the specific strands which are woven together to form *Plumb* and which also constitute more indirectly — but just as fundamentally — the basis of Gee's work as a whole:

Much of George and Edith Plumb's early history is Chapple history. Not all.... He was though a Presbyterian minister ... and he was sent to prison for sedition. His religious career, his opinions, his wanderings, were very like George Plumb's. However, George and Edith's domestic life is largely imaginary.... The twelve Plumb children are not the fourteen Chapple children.... Felicity, Oliver, Robert, Alfred — the twelve — are fictional beings...

Chapple and Plumb; the true life record of a New Zealand nonconformist and an imaginary domestic life; fact and fiction; in grafting these elements together to produce *Plumb* Gee has again, but more fully than ever and from a very different standpoint than before, both recorded a page of New Zealand history and at the same time written a notable contribution to world fiction.

The book opens when Plumb is in his eighties on the morning of his departure from his home to visit his children. The immediate impulse behind this is the way in which one of his daughters has reminded him of his long-dead wife. The expression on her face is the same as her mother's and constitutes for him 'thorns of remembrance. They start in me a pleasurable pain. It prompts me to my journey, my gathering in of my children; prompts me to a searching of my past' (*P*, p. 9). The account of this journey becomes in turn a record of the spiritual odyssey of his life.

The novel does not present in detail the various episodes of this — from the zeal of his early Presbyterianism in the previous century, then his evolution through Christian Socialism to militant pacificism during the first world war, when he is sent to prison for sedition, then on to socialism and, finally, to the position of a freethinker. Nor does it dwell upon the stages of his domestic life, from courtship, to marriage, to becoming a father, widower and grandfather. Enough, however, is given to draw a full and rounded portrait of the man and to establish the salient features of his personality. Moreover these are enhanced by the narrative technique. As the title implies, Plumb is the centre around which all revolves; written in the first person (again like *In My Father's Den*), his is the consciousness through which everything in the novel is mediated.

Through all the changing scenes of Plumb's life, what, if anything,

remains constant? Paramount amongst these stages is his early life as a Presbyterian minister. When he follows the dictates of his conscience and resigns from the ministry despite all the sacrifices this calls for — not least from his family — basically the change is not really a great one. 'New *Presbyter* is but *Old Priest* writ large'; Milton's line is also relevant here. The Rev. George Plumb forsakes the Presbyterian ministry, yes, but he remains in all essentials a nonconformist all his life. The scene of the battle with his conscience shifts, but the fight goes on — cost what it may.

There is also another aspect of the novel which remains the same throughout. In Hasting's *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* the definition of the duties of a Presbyterian minister which are laid down there can also be used to define one of the main qualities of the novel: 'His office entitles him to preach, to administer the sacraments, to exercise discipline, to admonish and exhort.'

When Plumb withdraws from the ministry he ceases indeed to administer the sacraments, but the other duties are still pursued with unshakable conviction in the need to do so and, if anything, even more zealously than before. Plumb is a man with a mission in life, and the reader is kept aware of this fact throughout the book by the prose-style in which it is written. This is not the neutral style of Gee's previous fiction: lucid, vivid, terse. It still retains these qualities, but something else is added as well. The style is one strongly coloured throughout by the personality of Plumb. Plumb's unswerving conviction that his sole guidance in life is to be derived from following what his conscience, and his conscience alone, dictates leads to an adamant self-righteousness which sets its stamp indelibly on every page of the novel — 'My children have brought little comfort to me, but that is no proper complaint. I have never wished for comfort, but for thorns, for battle in the soul's arena' (*P*, p. 11); or:

Do I still have evil passions? No! I have conquered. My ideal was Wordsworth's, plain living and high thinking, and all I have ever known of lust or rage or envy or greed I have plucked from my heart and put from me and the very places where they had their life I have burned in the cleansing flame. (*P* pp. 11-12)

or:

And I thought, gentility is the enemy of life, it gets in the way of natural response, it's like trying to eat your food with gloves on or drink tea from a tumbler. Gentility had been Edie's vice. Not puritanism. Nothing wrong with that, it's maligned by the ignorant and self-indulgent. I have been a puritan all my life. (*P*, p. 48)

'To preach, to exercise discipline, to admonish and exhort'; if this sums up much of Plumb's vocation in life it also affords a precise description of the language in which much of the book is written from first to last.

'oGeorges', his wife asks near the beginning of the novel, 'do you think a person should put off doing something he believes is right because he knows it will hurt somebody else?' (*P*, p. 22). Couched in a hesitant, low-key tone, the question is nevertheless one that resounds throughout the book. Plumb's answer is no, and it is an answer charting a course of action from which he never deviates an inch whatever the price to be paid or the sacrifice demanded of himself, his friends, his wife, children and family. Many of his children bear the scars this doctrine inflicts upon them; chief amongst these is his son, Alfred. Plumb discovers that he is a homosexual in love with John Willis, a friend of the family, and, in a scene where he takes on some of the dimensions of a figure from the Old Testament, he denounces Alfred and exercises discipline with a vengeance:

Alfred and John were coming over the bridge. I met them, raised my palm to ward them off.

'Don't come into my house. You are dead. You are dead to me, Alfred. Never come here again.' And I flung the sovereigns on the bricks in front of him. 'Your name isn't Plumb. There's money to change your name.' And I fled again, for I saw the danger of his face becoming human.

I shut myself in our bedroom. I lay trembling on the bed in which Alfred had been conceived and borne. It was my right to kill him, kill the beast, as God had killed these creatures of filth long ago.

So in my mind I killed him; and killed him again. (*P*, p. 215)

This son is now numbered amongst the children Plumb seeks to gather in. Twenty-five years have elapsed since he pronounced judgement and their meeting again at the end of the book is very far from being one of reconciliation. Alfred repudiates the role of the prodigal son, refuses to have any communication with the man once his father, and smashes Plumb's ear-trumpet into fragments.

For many years Plumb has been afflicted with deafness and has used this ear-trumpet. Its symbolism has the same clarity which one finds in the symbols in Gee's other novels. In the first paragraph of the book we are told that although on festive or family occasions, 'I carry the instrument with me, more to satisfy expectations than out of a wish to hear, in normal times I'm allowed my aural blackness. Indeed I enjoy it. It sharpens my other senses, especially my sense of otherness'. Now, at the

end of the book, his isolation and sense of otherness is total: 'I heard nothing. Being without my trumpet was an advantage. I knew I would not buy another one' (*P.* p. 269). He knows too that he is near death and adds: 'I did not judge myself. The time for judgements had gone' (*P.* p. 270).

But have they? It may be so for Plumb — but for the reader? The moral dilemma posed in the question put by Plumb's wife not only echoes through the book, but also carries a resonance that extends far beyond the last page. Does the price for following the dictates of conscience at the cost of inflicting suffering upon others ever become too high to pay? If so — when? Is the conviction of being in the right always and invariably a sufficient guide for moral conduct? What then can replace this conviction? Gee's explicitness, that one has noted time and again in the previous novels, here gives way before a clear-sighted and steady recognition of the moral complexities involved. *Plumb* neither provides any easy answer to these questions, nor does it allow the reader any; this too is one of its achievements.

As for George Plumb himself, if the salient features of his character are clear-cut, what is much more complex is the reaction induced in the reader. The stubborn, rigid, doctrinaire bigotry of his beliefs can be roundly condemned; the tenacious, unflinching courage with which he maintains and defends them extorts a reluctant admiration. *He* may remain constant; the reader's attitude to him continually oscillates between these two poles.

The end of his journey has really, it becomes apparent, been clear from the start. 'In my beginning is my end': Elliot's line from 'East Coker' also applies to Plumb. In a discussion with Bluey, formerly a lapsed Catholic, but now again a believer, Plumb is told that he needs a priest as an intermediary with God. True to his nonconformist faith, Plumb replies "No, Bluey. No. That doesn't follow at all. There's just man and his Maker. Man facing God. Nobody in between" (*P.* p. 116). Instead of a gathering in of his children, he discovers finally that they are more widely dispersed than ever. Bereft at the end of his wife and of his family, with no meaningful communication possible with anyone, Plumb is no longer a parent seeking his children. 'Man facing God. Nobody in between'; George Plumb is left facing the only father and with the only relationship that has, ultimately, any meaning for him.

Gee is still writing and may well, one has every ground for hoping, publish another novel as good; it will prove much more difficult to produce a better.

NOTES

1. *The Big Season* (Hutchinson, London, 1962), p. 117.
2. *A Special Flower* (Hutchinson, London, 1965), p. 75. All further references are to this edition and are included in the text.
3. *In My Father's Den* (Faber & Faber, London, 1972), p. 13. All further references are to this edition and are included in the text.
4. *Op. cit.*, London, 1960, p. 278.
5. *Games of Choice* (Faber & Faber, London, 1976), p. 16. All further references are to this edition and are included in the text.
6. *A Glorious Morning, Comrade* (Oxford University Press, London, 1975), p. 162.
7. *Plumb* (Faber & Faber, London, 1978), p. 48. All further references are to this edition and are included in the text.
8. *Op. cit.*, London, 1918, Vol. X, p. 248.

This essay is a much revised and extended version of a paper on Maurice Gee given at a conference on New Zealand literature held at the University of Aarhus in October, 1980. Its publication enables me to place on record the gratitude felt by all the participants in the conference to Anna Rutherford, who organised it, and to the government of New Zealand, who, through its embassy, generously funded and actively encouraged the conference throughout all its stages.

Bill Manhire

LIFE WITH MADAME ROSA

'Make sure your crystal ball has batteries in it...'

1
You never could resist
an invitation to the Fun Fair. You just
love all the excitement of the big
dipper, bumper cars etc.
On one of your many visits there
you notice a good looking boy
selling tickets at a shooting range.
You just keep spending your money there.
When you have no more money left
you find you have fallen in love with him.

2
I see a ring. It has a large
diamond stone. It is not yours.
It is in a shop window which you pass
each morning on your way to school.
Your dream is to have that ring.
One day as you stand looking at it
you hear the voice of a man
who asks you whether you would like it
to be yours. You are scared
and walk off but the same evening
the ring arrives at your house
in a tiny envelope. You never
find out how it got there
or who the man was.

3

Soon after you marry
you have a dear little baby boy.
Your husband is not earning much
and you have to give up your job
and your flat is small
but you both love the child
and he is jolly and easy, you do not
mind working for his sake.



4

I see snow and you have fallen a long way.
Your skis have fallen off
and you are stuck in deep snow
unable to move. Someone comes to you.
He is strong, good looking.
He lifts you up
and gets your skis back on.
You ski off together.
He could be your future husband.

5

One day

you are left a farm by a remote cousin.
At first you are rather horrified
at the prospect of farming
but you try the life for a year,
it is fun and useful and you decide
to make it your career. Your friends
and relations love staying with you.

6

You are very fond of animals,
especially rare animals threatened
with extinction. Late in your life
you will become involved
in a movement to preserve the tiger.
You will become very famous.
People throughout the world will be proud of you.

7

You go big game shooting in India.
One day you lie for hours
hoping for a tiger. Quite suddenly
a huge tiger appears apparently
from nowhere and stares straight at you.
He is so magnificent you forget to shoot
and the next moment he is gone.
You are not at all popular.

8

Many years from now
you will live in India. Your job
will take you for long hikes
through the jungle. On one of these
you come across a tiger cub.
You bring up this cub in your home,
he is small and loveable
and you love him like another human being.
When he is barely one year old
he will go back to the jungle
and lead his own life there forever.

I see a place of great excitement,
 I think it is a fun fair, there are
 lights and crowds of people.
 I see you there but you are unhappy.
 You have lost your purse with all your money
 and cannot have much fun.
 But somebody has seen your plight.
 He comes to help you, he pays for
 both of you. There is always darkness
 for the Queen of Hearts but he could be
 important in your life, he could be the one.



Madame Ross is an English children's toy: a battery-operated crystal ball which is accompanied by a book of predictions. Bill Manhire's poem is 'composed' of extracts from the various predictions. The instruction book includes the following salutary advice: 'Remember always that nobody wants to hear a fortune of gloom and misery. Disappointment, hardship and sadness are part of life, but are usually overcome, so make any sad stories end up happily. This is what people like to hear and you want a satisfied customer in the end, don't you?'

Nadine Gordimer

'A STORY FOR THIS PLACE AND TIME':

AN INTERVIEW WITH NADINE GORDIMER ABOUT *BURGER'S DAUGHTER*

In July 1980 Susan Gardner sought an interview in Johannesburg with Nadine Gordimer to discuss her 1979 novel, *Burger's Daughter*. This was banned for import and distribution in South Africa one month after its London publication on a range of grounds specified in the Publications Act, 1974, including propagating Communist opinions; indecency and offensiveness to public morals and religious feelings or convictions of some inhabitants of South Africa; being prejudicial to the safety of the State, the general welfare, peace and good order; creating 'a psychosis of revolution and rebellion'; making 'several unbridled attacks against the authority entrusted with the maintenance of law and order and the safety of the state'.¹

Could you tell me how and when you decided that Burger's Daughter was a story that had to be told about this particular place and time?

Well, I was fascinated by the *idea* of the story for a long time. I can't tell you exactly when because these things always begin very much in the sub-conscious. I can't say which came first, the general idea or the story. Maybe first of all there was the idea: the role of white hard-core Leftists. But that would be a kind of theoretical approach, an historical or a socio-political approach, and I'm an imaginative writer. I don't write that kind of thing. One could have written a factual book about that: it has been done, I think, very thoroughly. But that is approaching it as a phenomenon — a sociological/political phenomenon. So perhaps it occurred to me originally in that form.

But then something — as an imaginative writer — really took hold of me, and that was the idea of what it would have been like — what it

would be like — to be the son or daughter of one of those families. I became fascinated to see how, as time went by, in my own life, for instance, my own generation, we moved away from our parents' lives and our parents' political beliefs (or lack of them): we changed our whole attitude. But — the children of Communists, of white Communists, and of hard-core Leftists generally, but particularly of Communists, did not: they simply took up the torch. It was a relay race of generations, so to speak, and they did not seem to question the way of life that these political beliefs dictated. It wasn't just simply a matter of saying I think this or I think that, and voting, and going to a political meeting. It was putting your whole *life* on the line. Your political beliefs as a Communist completely dominated your whole way of life in a country like this, even before the Communist Party was banned. And you must remember, the Communist Party was formed in 1921, here. So the children of these Communists — and perhaps even their grand-children — were Communists during a much more trying period: because in 1950 the Communist Party was banned.

Now, what happened to these young people? The amazing thing was that it was quite clear — since they got arrested, since they went to prison, since they took part in all sorts of activities after the Party was banned — that they had not thrown off, or abandoned, their parents' beliefs or their parents' incredibly disciplined way of life. I became fascinated by this long ago, I should think — perhaps as long ago as 1949, the first big 'Treason Trial'... I had never been to a large political trial before; I don't think I had ever been to a political trial at all. This trial — the preliminary examination part of it — went on for nine months; then, indeed, that was the trial, because everybody was dismissed. But it was the beginning of a series of political trials where, alas, this didn't happen. After that they came thick and fast, and I went to quite a lot of them. And looked at some of these very young people — children or teen-agers, left with the responsibility of the whole household and younger children. It must have affected their lives tremendously; it must have been a great intrusion on the kind of secret treaties that you have when you're an adolescent: you know, the time that you spend with your buddies, and don't want to be involved in grown-up responsibilities. That's how I became fascinated with these young people, and I suppose the character Rosa gradually began to take shape. Since I'm a woman myself, it was in the form of one of the young women, or one of the girls, that I saw the story.

Why was it Rosa rather than her brother Tony who was given the job, in the novel, of critically inheriting the political task?

It may be that women were particularly prominent; and also because I knew a number of women in this position, either as children, or in the position of Rosa's mother. And their relationship fascinated me.

But why is Rosa's relationship to her ideological inheritance patriarchally presented? It is after all her mother Cathy who is in prison when the book starts, and who is identified as 'the real revolutionary' both by Ivy Terblanche (who admired her and worked with her) and by Katya Bagnelli, whom Cathy supplanted as Lionel Burger's wife and comrade.

Yes, but you see again, the incredible layers of meaning in the lives of people like this. The question of who was the more important person in Party work would very often be covered up, in the eyes of the world, with the facade of the marriage. So that one would conveniently make use — particularly in this country, particularly because the Burgers are an Afrikaner family — of the convention that Papa is the master; meantime, probably, it was the woman who was the more important member.

Who, perhaps, by capitalising on sexual double standards, could be getting away with some political manoeuvres?

Yes, yes, in the end this was no protection; but it had to be tested, perhaps, to see whether it was. And, of course, a woman could be treated more leniently in court, when it came to bail: if a woman and her husband were arrested, their application for bail might also be on compassionate grounds, that her children were young and were left at home without anybody to care for them. The court was much more likely to let the woman out on bail than the man; yet that woman might be the brains of the whole organization. This kind of layer after layer of meaning in people's lives was so different from the lives of the sort of people that I grew up with, whose lives were simpler, whose loyalties were so much simpler...

Might your presentation of Rosa as a dissident Afrikaner woman who is betraying her racial heritage account for some of the Publication Control Board's hostility?

I don't think so. It might, perhaps, on a certain deep-psychological level, have influenced one of the censors who read the book originally and banned it. Rosa certainly would not seem to be a nice *Boere meisie*, (but) the whole idea of the *Boere meisie*, this good, quiet, church-going girl, has clearly become outdated. It's a concept not equal to the realities of the present life here. And I think one can draw an interesting parallel with the Voortrekker period. Think of the kind of role that women played then. When necessary they picked up a gun, and they gave birth to their children in the middle of the veld, without any medical help, without the proverbial kettle of hot water boiling. So they stepped out of this idealistic role of the woman in the background, the submissive woman, and now you have your Rosas and, indeed — what was her name? — Marie, her cousin, who in a different way went out into the big world to advertise South African oranges in Paris and ended up sheltering an international terrorist.

G.J. van der Merwe, the 'expert on security matters' consulted by the Publications Appeal Board, concluded that the book's readership would be limited to 'literary critics and ... people with a specific interest in subversive movements in South Africa.' Did you have an implied or envisaged audience in mind while you were writing the book?

I don't write that way. I never have anybody in mind; I think that's death to any writer. You can't get anywhere near the truth as you know it if you have any idea — if you're wondering what this one's going to think of it, what that one's going to think of it. I've said before, and for me it's a truth that must be repeated — I think the best way to write is as if you were already dead. This is sometimes misunderstood. I don't mean that you ignore the reality around us. Far from it. My idea is that, in order to come to grips properly with that reality, you must have no fears for yourself, for the embarrassment that it's going to cause your family, for the embarrassment that it's going to cause you. One can refuse to answer questions, but when one is sitting down and writing something, one mustn't refuse any truth that comes to mind, one mustn't censor oneself from following any line of thoughts. I'm analysing this now, but it's to me absolutely natural. I simply don't think about it. When I first began to write, and was not politically aware (when, indeed, there was no political danger as there is now), again, I didn't think at all about whether I was going to offend when I wrote my first novel (*The Lying Days*, 1953), which obviously, like most first novels, has elements of my own child-

hood. My mother was alive. Afterwards, when it was published, I thought, Oh my God, what's she going to think when she reads it? But had I begun to think about this while I was writing it, I should never have written it. That's the answer, I think. For me.

Burger's Daughter is an appealing book for feminists because it explores that movement's basic contention that 'the personal is political'. And I'm intrigued by the attraction for Rosa of other women: Marisa Kgosana, the wife of an imprisoned black political leader, and Katya, her father's first wife. They seem to be very important, emotionally and as models, and although Rosa is said to be trying to understand and relate to her dead father, Lionel, she could also be regarded as searching for her mother. And I think the novel relevant to feminists not least because the 'women's liberation meeting' (if that is what one could call it), described as a 'harmless liberal activity' and organised by the fellow-traveller Flora Donaldson, may be too pessimistic and dismissively presented. Do you think there are any South African women's organisations that could be effective in the struggle against South Africa's racial capitalism?

There are, and there have been. But — and it's a big but — as soon as they say, 'We are completely apolitical', they might as well shut up shop. Because there's no issue in this country — I defy anybody to bring up an issue, except perhaps the very personal one of the love relationship between men and women... But all the other issues — can you have a bank account in your name, the ownership of property, the rights over your children, what happens when you get divorced, all these things, not to mention of course the most important of all, equal pay for equal work, and other conditions, maternity benefits and so on — as soon as you touch any of the real feminist issues you are going right into the heart of the racial problem.

But I think Flora represents a facile, and rather biological, notion of sisterhood, and she's too optimistic and sentimental about it; perhaps very generation-bound as well. She doesn't realise that any solidarity between black and white women would have to be constructed and fought for, and always changing.

It's also curious because Flora is the kind of woman who has been — well, all right, she's been on the fringe of real political action, but then she's moved into the typically feminine position of being warned by her

husband. And this happens so much here. After Sharpeville — but it was always there, it must have been quite a source of conflict within the bourgeois marriage here (white marriage I'm talking about, of course), that the husband said, Right — I admire you for your courage, I admire you for your views, I share them of course, but I don't want you going to prison, what benefit is it going to bring to anybody? It was then that somebody like Flora, with the very genuine feelings that she had about liberation, would look around for another outlet. It's interesting, too, because it relates to a little theory I have about the basis of this society still being so colonial, especially in personal relationships, and how this affects one's effectiveness in the outside world. Women in our frontier society (the ordinary women, not politicised women) were the first really to begin to have uneasy feelings about blacks, and about the conditions under which blacks lived. And, for example, the problems that black women have with their children; there were few if any nursery schools for blacks, so this kind of thing began to interest public-spirited women. Again, of course, it was not 'political'; no, it was not even reform; it was charity. So that kind of activity, along with fringe artistic activity... I can remember as a child in a mining town where I was born and brought up, the choirs, the amateur theatricals — right, there would be men in the cast of these amateur plays, but the audiences were likely to be predominantly female. When a musician came from abroad, or a ballet company, perhaps, came from Johannesburg to this mining town — again, the audience would be 90% female. So that culture and charity, with a slapdash kind of social reform, were a woman's domain. A social conscience was a leisure-time activity, because the man was busy earning a living; he was the bread-winner and protector. This was a real frontier society conceptualising of the roles, the 'ordained' roles.... And I think this lingers, and it has lingered to the extent that it has produced Floras. Highly intelligent, well-educated women who are still in that kind of relationship to the husband.

The Black Sash organization, which I admire very much, is a most interesting example of this. I've often said to people, "Why is there no Black Sash for men?" The Black Sash is now open to men, and I have one or two friends (I think Sydney Kentridge, the Biko lawyer, is one, who belongs), but this is obviously just a nominal thing. The fact is — who are the husbands of these women? Why are the women so much more enlightened? Why are the women defiant of public opinion, defiant of the police, and certainly *not* apolitical? The Black Sash is a women's organization that is trying to bring about real social reform, that is opposing this

government, that is opposing National Party policy, and is now going radically further than the Progressive-Reform Party policy and all the white political parties. And these women have the guts to do this. Now what happens when they go home, I wonder? What are the discussions at home? I know of two cases where the man has been politicised by the wife, to a very interesting extent. So far, insofar as it has affected the children (again influenced by the mother) — the children, having started off with some sort of liberal teaching from the mother, move on and become more and more radical. I know of one who is indeed in exile now, having had to flee on an exit permit. When this girl was detained — in prison without trial — her father, a conventional and conservative man until then, made a stand on principle, which is so rare. He had been politicised by his wife and by his children. Yet there is no men's Black Sash. Men do not go and stand in protest outside the university or John Vorster Square. And there is no feminist lobby at all in the Parliament. But it would be by proxy, because there would be a couple of white women talking about the disabilities of black women. And as far as black women are concerned, their concern is the oppression under which all blacks live. The feminist battle must come afterwards.

I think it must come simultaneously, but it's very difficult for black women to admit that, especially if under pressure in their own communities.

Yes, it's very difficult. My view is a different one. I feel that if the real battle for human rights is won the kingdom of ... feminine liberation follows. Because if we are all free individuals, that's all we need, we don't have to have any special feeling because we are women. But I know this view is not shared by feminists.

About relations with blacks as they are experienced and recounted by white characters, Anthony Sampson in The New York Times said that no one had better described certain aspects of township, in this case Soweto, life. Yet one of the co-publishers at Raven Press, Mthobi Mutloose, as reported in The Star (Johannesburg), has stated (12 July 1980):

I feel that whites writing about blacks is just nothing but an academic exercise. It is not authentic. It lacks that feeling of the people. Good writing should have emotions and a purpose... whites, be they writers or politicians, experience only the life of the privileged. All they can do is to just imagine the Black Experience (p. 12)

What are the prices that whites must pay for acceptance by, and collaboration with, blacks? To what extent are these still possible?

There are really two questions here, because the point you're getting from Mothobi's argument is a political one, it's about political action, and the other question is its reflection in literature. My comment about that statement is that it ignores completely the very large areas of contact between black and white, here, *all our lives*. This, indeed, is the failure and lie of apartheid; it has *not* succeeded.

But Mothobi's statement seems to uphold or echo apartheid, in fact.

In some ways apartheid has succeeded only too well. I've said this before; there are areas of black experience that no white writer can write about. But there are vast areas of actual experience — rubbing shoulders with blacks, having all kinds of relationships with blacks.... It's not as simple as it sounds... all kinds of conflicts, of a very special nature, that arise between black and white.... And this leads whites to know quite a lot about blacks. And it leads blacks to know quite a lot about whites. The author of that statement cast no opinion on white characters in black books. Are we to say then that no black person can possibly create a white character? Of course, this is nonsense. I do believe that when we have got beyond the apartheid situation — there's a tremendous problem for whites, because unless you put down cultural roots, unless whites are allowed in by blacks, and unless we can make out a case for our being accepted and we can forge a common culture together, whites are going to be marginal, because we will be outside the central enigmas of life here. To a large extent we are now. But there's still that area of conflict which is from an artistic point of view fruitful. But when that is gone, if we are not integrated, if we have not cut loose from the colonial culture.... And make no mistake about it, blacks are hampered by it, too. The very fact that the black writer, Mothobi Moolose, who gave that interview, edits a magazine, or the fact that he is interviewed — these are all the tools of white culture that he has taken over, and why not? Why not use them? They are there. I object to the attempt to convince people that blacks do not want to use any of these tools at all. The fact is, you cannot have a literature without them. And you can't have a modern culture without them. And all blacks want a modern culture. Why on earth not? This is a heritage that belongs to all of us.

But there are areas where I know there are things I cannot write. For

instance, if I were to want to write a novel about a black child growing up between 1976 and now — not so much in Soweto, because all my life I have had contacts with city blacks and all my life I've been in and out of townships, I may not have lived there, but I know something about it... — But a black child, say, living in a country area, who perhaps doesn't even speak a word of English — there are many like that — and perhaps a few broken words of Afrikaans — I think that the concept of reality, the relation to the entities in the life of that child would be something beyond my imaginative powers as a writer, even though writers are extraordinary people. They're monsters in a way, they can enter other people's lives. Imagination is a mysterious thing.

Is there anything about the style of Burger's Daughter — or any of your other work, for that matter — that you regard for whatever social or genetic reasons as most likely to have been written by a woman?

No. I don't think so. It's difficult to judge. And of course, I have written one book in the first person as a man, and I've written two or three from a male point of view. Perhaps some man will say, as some black may say, how can she possibly know. But I don't really feel we're all that different. I have this feeling that there's this over-riding ... humanity — not in a 'humanitarian' sense, but just what it is to be a human being: to know hurt, pain, fear, discouragement, frustration, this is common to both sexes —

And sexuality. Your 'inside' descriptions of male sexuality astonish me.

Yes, but I've often been astonished by the 'inside' descriptions of female sexuality written by men. So perhaps we know each other on these levels. Below our consciousness. And when you come to write, that's what you tap.

Would you regard the style of Burger's Daughter as different, or a development from, your previous work? How would you compare it with stories in A Soldier's Embrace (1980), for instance?

For me it's very, very simple. For each idea, there's never been anything but one right way to say it. Perhaps that way is going to be in the first person, perhaps it's going to be in the past tense, perhaps it's going to be a monologue, perhaps it's going to be a free association, perhaps it's

going to be ... classical. If I don't find it, I can't write. In *A Soldier's Embrace*, there's a story called 'Oral History', where the title is the key to the right style for the story. I wanted to tell it the way you tell something that has actually happened (an episode in the chronicle of a village, a people). Then it has to have these echoing tones, like a bell tolling, that you've heard many times before, but the sounds mean something, you can retell a hundred times. That was for me the right way to tell that story; I had to find it. Then there is the story about the unborn child. Well, there's no way to 'tell' that in a direct narrative fashion. Because it is a mystery. It's surrounded by strange waters in a womb; it's projecting yourself into a journey we've all taken, and God knows what it is like, it's like going into space. So the style has to be something that suggests an apprehension of the world much removed from normal senses.

But — with *Burger's Daughter* — here again there's this slippery fish. Rosa, who is herself a girl like any other girl; she has roles imposed upon her by her mother and father, underneath those roles there's her own. For instance, she's sent to visit the young man in prison: there is a role imposed upon her, but she's playing another role, and the young man is playing yet another. So there are three roles somehow to be conveyed by the same character. It came to me, when I was pondering about writing that book, since she was someone who had so much imposed upon her from the outside; since these were people who lived with layers of protective colouring in order to carry out what they thought was their purpose in life; since it has been my own experience, knowing people like that, that there are infinite gradations of intimacy.... I had somebody, a woman friend, whom I've known all my life, and terribly intimately, who lived in this house — but there are areas of her life I've known nothing about. I would, almost certainly, if she'd not been a devout Communist, but there were things she didn't tell me and there were probably other things she didn't tell other people. Life lived in compartments, well, how do you approach somebody like that? And so the idea came to me of Rosa questioning herself as others see her and whether what they see is what she really is. And that developed into another stylistic question — if you're going to tell a book in the first person, to whom are you talking? You asked me earlier when I write, what is my audience. And I told you I have none, and that is the truth. But if a character of mine is speaking in the first person there's an audience assumed, which is one person or the whole world. It's always there. And that is why Joseph Conrad uses the device of Marlow — because then Marlow is speaking to him. Conrad is somebody who's living the individual life that she's never tried, she's

testing his word against hers all the time. This hippie son of a scrap dealer, brought up with a completely different idea about what's meaningful in life, in her life. And when she's talking to him, she's indeed appealing to him: this is how it was for me, how is it for you? Then — it's obvious, but the thing is, it only really came to me afterwards — if she goes to Europe, to whom would she go? She must go to Katya, to her father's first wife.

That wasn't originally planned?

No. When I began to write the book, I knew she would go to Europe, and under very strange circumstances (guilty over having compromised herself for a passport). She doesn't know her father's first wife, and she has a certain curiosity about her; and Katya lives at a remove from the active political exiles whom Rosa has more or less undertaken to avoid. She goes to Katya, it seems, because there is nowhere else to go ... And then, as so often in life, the unconscious motive appears: Rosa thought to learn from Katya, how to defect? Because Katya has 'defected' from Lionel Burger.

To turn to the question of the different people whom Rosa addresses. Inevitably, in the end, she does talk to her father, but perhaps only after he's dead. So you can see how for me style really grew out of content. I couldn't have told that story the way I did *The Conservationist*, which was without any concessions explaining anything to anybody. If you didn't catch on — who was who and what was missing and what was assumed, then you were just left in doubt. But, in *Burger's Daughter*, you see there was too much — take for instance the whole question of what the Communist Party was, here. I couldn't not explain that, so I had to find a way to do it, and fortunately for me the device of the biographer of Lionel Burger enabled me to fill some of that in.

You have called Burger's Daughter a political novel, and a novel of ideas. And you've also distinguished contemporary white South African writing by saying that it's predominantly critical, analytical, 'protestant in mood', while black writings are 'inspirational', 'and that is why the government fears them'. You've claimed that the inspirational presently predominates over satire in Black writing, for instance, because satire requires 'a licence for self-criticism that loyalty to the Black struggle for a spiritual identity does not grant at present'. But would you further claim that Burger's Daughter is not inspirational — in intention or in effect?

Burger's Daughter is — much more, I think, than my other books. My method has so often been irony. I find irony very attractive in other writers, and I find life full of irony, my own life and everybody else's; somehow one of the secret locks of the personality lies in what is ironic in us. In *Burger's Daughter* irony is like a kind of corrective, a rein. It comes from Rosa, she has that in her confrontation with Clare (a contemporary of hers, also the daughter of Communist parents), but very often the inspirational took over. Because there are things — it comes from what is here, if you look at what happened in Soweto in '76 and what has happened again now (school and meat workers' boycotts; municipal workers' strikes in Johannesburg), there's so much inspiration in it: a reaching out, a bursting forth ... the very recklessness comes from that. The very courage to risk, with your stone in your hand, being shot down. You know, if you look at the history of Africa or any other country — let's confine it to here — the famous time when the Xhosas burnt their crops and said 'the white man is going to be pushed into the sea'; 'on a certain day the sun will come up twice, two blood-red suns will rise', and they feared nothing. There was the same thing in Madagascar, there were bloody riots against the French and they believed that bullets would turn to water (that same legend really comes from Africa, it has been inspirational here before, too). There was something of that in these school kids in '76 — something that suddenly took fear away.

If, voluntarily like Joyce or forced like Solzhenitsyn you had to leave South Africa, what then would be your available source and substance?

I've lived here for 56 years, all my life. I've still got a great deal inside me and don't know if now, at this stage of my life, I have it worked out. It would depend, too, on how I got involved in the society I went to live in. This theory that you lose your roots — I know that this is very true, and there are very few writers who have the strength, and the character, and the talent, to overcome it. If you look at what happens to black writers in exile, you don't know. It's very bad. But — if you look at Doris Lessing, if you look at Dan Jacobson, particularly with Lessing, it's possible for some writers to transplant and grow.

Have any critics missed what you regard as especially important aspects of Burger's Daughter?

I think some critics discovered things in it I didn't know about. Two

reviewers pointed out that it is also the story of a daughter-father relationship and of a child-parent relationship. And I hadn't thought about it in that way, but of course it is. And then Conor Cruise O'Brien says that it's a profoundly religious book. Which, of course, is written by an atheist. But that could happen, most certainly.

Well, Conor Cruise O'Brien once editorialised in The Observer that E. P. Thompson is not a Marxist, and neither is Christopher Hill — so he's twisting his own definitions.

But I think he had a profound point in that in the book was the idea of redemption being entered into through suffering. Taking it on in one way or another, politically- or religiously-motivated, that is the only choice you have. You can't opt out of it. One thing I think lots of people have missed — the reason why Rosa goes back to South Africa and, ultimately, to prison. It's not just because she has that terrible midnight telephone call with her former black step-brother, Baasie, and that really brings her nose to nose with reality. It started long before, it started in France, in that village, when she met that woman in the street in her dressing gown, who doesn't know where she is. And it really hits Rosa that you get old, lonely, dotty. That you suffer. That Katya, running from political suffering, has simply postponed what is coming. And Didier is also very important, because he shows Rosa what the alternatives are. The alternatives have some horrible sides to them, too. That you man is living for pay with a woman much older than he, a kind of prisoner who thinks he's free.

I wonder if the terminology of redemption and suffering — which gives history a metaphysical cast — isn't too fatalistic and amorphous a formulation for what is really systematic, structural exploitation and oppression in South Africa — which can be transformed.

Oh, quite, and that's why Rosa comes back. If you sit around on a Greek island and ... I don't know, take a purely feminine example, have a face lift and tint your hair, what's happening is staving off the suffering that will come to you. It's a fact of life, that kind of animal suffering. But there's another kind of suffering that you can fight and that human beings have been fighting generation after generation, for thousands of years. And I think Rosa's overcome by disgust; this passivity, this submission. And wants to become embattled with suffering.

Do you think that the sensuous-redemptive appeal of blacks is romanticised in the book, especially through the character of Marisa?

I think the sensuous-redemptive thing is dangerous. But I've seen it even among my — my Burger-type friends. It's very strong, you know. And it's powerful. It also sounds so sentimental, but it's true that when we whites go away we miss that certain warmth. Even now, I find when I'm in New York I just can't believe that the vibrations that come from the blacks I see are what they are. Because I'm used to a different relationship with blacks. It's just incredible that this endures; has endured. With all the awful resentments that there are between us, and all the troubles, there still is this strong bond.

NOTES

1. Nadine Gordimer et al., *What Happened to Burger's Daughter, or How South African Censorship Works* (Emmarentia, South Africa: 1980), pp. 6-14. The reasons are listed in a letter from the Directorate of Publications to Nadine Gordimer's lawyer, 16 July 1979. The eventual release of *Burger's Daughter*, and the Publication Control Board's attempts further to polarise black and white South African writers by selectively unbanning the work of some white writers whilst manfully suppressing work by black writers, are discussed by Nadine Gordimer in 'Censorship and the Word' (reprinted in *The Bloody Horse*, this is the text of her speech — during which a government official walked out — accepting the 1979 CNA literary award for the best South African book in English); 'New Forms of Strategy — No Change of Heart' (*Critical Arts* 1, No 2 (June 1980), pp. 27-41, and reprinted in *Index on Censorship* 10, No 1 (February 1981), pp. 4-9); and (with others), *What Happened to Burger's Daughter, or How South African Censorship Works*. Other discussions of South African censorship appear in Kewyn Sole, 'The Abortion of the Intellect: Literary Circles and -Change- in South Africa Today' (in *Dead in One's Own Lifetime* (Rondebosch, Cape Town: National Union of South African Students, 1979), pp. 65-91); *English in Africa* (Grahamstown: Institute for the Study of English in Africa) 7, No 2 (September 1980); Gerald Gordon, 'The right to write: a critical appraisal of the South African Publications Act of 1974' (*Index on Censorship* 4, No 2 (Summer 1975), pp. 41-44); John D. Jackson, *Justice in South Africa* (Penguin, 1980); and Louise Silver, comp., 'Publications Appeal Board. Digest of Decisions' (Johannesburg: Centre for Applied Legal Studies, University of the Witwatersrand).
2. C.J. van der Merwe, 'Report on Burger's Daughter of Nadine Gordimer' in *What Happened to Burger's Daughter*.... p. 57.
3. Nadine Gordimer, 'New Forms of Strategy — No Change of Heart', *Critical Arts: a Journal for Media Studies* 1, No 2 (June 1980), pp. 27-35.



Nadine Gordimer. Photo: Thomas Victor.

Mbulelo Mzamane

ASPIRATIONS OF A BEEN-TO

He studied in the UK, I tell you,
Not America.
Home economics, you know, catering.
Not domestic science.
He learnt to appreciate classical music,

British folksongs, Scottish dancing,
 Not mbaqanga,
 None of that bodywriggling,
 Flipping footstamping,
 Fingersnapping
 Decadence.
 Composure, he has learnt, is a sign of good breeding.
 Only the concertos and the operas are worth listening to.
 His mind revolts against wallowing in emotion.
 He has read about the Kennedys —
 Great folks!
 Pity they can't be knighted!
 He was near enough to have been almost there
 At Mark Phillips and Princess Anne's wedding —
 The redletter day is marked in his diary.
 An experience he values as much
 Is when he shook hands and was photographed abroad
 With the last British High Commissioner to Botswana.
 Back home he joined the Gaborone club
 And felt terribly outraged
 By the Minister's decision to lower standards
 By opening the club's doors to every local.
 He is a patron of the Holiday Inn
 And deploras the admission of people without ties at the GH.
 He feels a deep sense of shame
 At his people's ignorance of foreign etiquette.
 His wife, who has never been beyond Zeerust,
 Has caught on pretty fast
 She can do wonders with the potatoes —
 Mashed, baked, fried, etcetera,
 In the best British tradition.
 They can now entertain,
 Except for one little snag.
 The grimy, slimy atmosphere of Bontleng, his present home.
 But he hopes to change quarters soon
 And move to New England
 Where his puppy, a gift from the Robinsons,
 Can grow up in a healthier environment
 And he can pin up a notice at the gate:
 'Tsaba ntja! — Beware of the dog!'

That First Novel

Having one's first novel published is not as glamorous an affair as the media makes readers believe. The would-be author would start by convincing himself, that 'this is it, this is what I want to do, I must write, I must tell a story or do nothing else. It is novel writing for me, no matter how long it takes, no matter whether I'm published or not. Write I must, and a novel it must be'.

Then follows that secret joyous state of the actual writing. Some lucky would-be male authors are, at this early stage, surrounded by good friends and doting members of their families who actually believe in them, believe in what they are doing, hopeful that one of them will be a real author one day. Many are regarded as authors simply because they are writing a book. The clap-clap of the typewriter is greeted with reverential awe as believers greet in hushed silence the gradual approach of their priest. This treatment has its compensations; one is hailed as an author by a doting mother, a would-be girl friend or wife. Women would-be authors are not so lucky. They are regarded as either eccentrics, extreme feminists or lesbians or both. The world, especially the African world, still regards the premise of serious writing as a masculine preserve. We all know this and accept this cultural lag, for unfortunately it is very true.

The only bad effect on a still unpublished author treated this way is that of facing the crash when it comes. This comes when he suddenly realizes that writing takes longer than he had previously calculated, or when he faces a plot that becomes, suddenly, impossible to handle, or worse still, when those admiring relatives and friends become stingy with their homage. They now want to see his book in print, his yacht on the Riviera, and his book become an overnight best seller currently being filmed in Hollywood. Now, alas, the would-be author finds himself alone and has to be really determined to be able to continue from here. Some hopeful authors perish at this stage and are never heard of again. They have had their glory, their praises, short-lived though they were. Invited

to parties by hopeful hostesses, the would-be author is politely asked, 'What happened to that lovely book we were all going to buy and read?' Then he stammers an explanation, unusually long, telling why the book has failed to materialize.

There is the other would-be author who has only himself to blame, only himself to disappoint, and only himself to attack when the crash comes. Many people still maintain that the sharing of personal pains makes them lighter. There are instances when this is true, but when it comes to the field of any artistic creation, I doubt it very much. Maybe the old masters knew the answer. How many times does one read of great painters never unveiling their work until they had satisfied themselves that every bit of their imagination had been captured on the canvas before them. These were lucky artists and secure creators. I should by now have learnt my lesson after Miss Humble and the experience I had with the burning of the work that would have been my first book, *The Bride Price*, but I never did. I am not that secure. But as I said earlier, I think I now survive as a writer, because I learned and practised the art of laughing at myself first.

As a result of all this conditioning, I now belong to the group of writers who, though they have convinced themselves that they are going to be a writer, never have much courage in telling others about it. And the few who know are encouraged, wickedly maybe, to make light of it, by the would-be authors themselves.

In my own case, this attitude kept everybody happy for a very long time. Having tucked my kids into bed, I banged away at an old God-forsaken typewriter which I picked up for only five pounds from the market where I then lived in North London. I still keep the old thing, but it has long given up the ghost, after the onslaught it had when I was typing and retyping my second book, *Second Class Citizen*.

The third stage of the would-be author's life is the most cruel and disheartening and the end of the road for many. This is the endless trips to the publishers, the unceasing flow of letters to newspapers and magazine editors. Take my own case, for example, as I happened to be one of the unluckiest would-be authors that have ever lived. I spent almost every week of 1968, 1969, 1970, trying to persuade publishers just to read my work. I didn't care whether I was paid for their publication or not, my only wish was that someone would share my dreams; that someone would tell me where it was that I was going wrong. I soon got used to the sound of returned manuscripts on the lino-covered floor of my council flat. The plop sounds of the fat returned envelopes dug immediate pits in my

stomach. It took years for those pits to be filled, but during those long lonely weeks of over ten years ago, the feeling was too horrible to describe. It was more of a mental thing. The physical reaction was not so bad. My stomach would start rumbling and then graduate into strong protestation, just as if one had eaten some poisoned stuff or drunk polluted water. I used to cure myself of this by simply leaving the returned manuscript there, completely ignoring it. I didn't need to read the accompanying letter, because by now I knew almost by heart how the nicely worded photocopied note read. They used to say that they thanked me very much for letting them read my lovely manuscript which they enjoyed enormously, but that they couldn't publish it at the moment. Then I used to ask myself, 'But when can they publish?' After a while, I accepted this as part of my life — this constant rejection. I even went to work at the Christmas post sorting office during my college holidays — at this time I was reading for an honours degree in Sociology. The money I got from those endless nights I used partly for my children's Christmas presents, the rest simply to buy typing paper and postage stamps. It was a good thing I kept all this to myself. But if anybody had asked me then, 'But look woman, what are you doing, sending all that typed stuff to publishers who never read it?' I would have told that person that I knew people who for ten to fifteen years gambled on the football pools, hoping that one day they would win the jackpot. The possibility of getting my work published was just as remote.

Then what made me keep on? Maybe I was young and stupid, or maybe there is something in what those who believe in horoscopes say — that people like me, born under Cancer, are crabby and tenacious. Or maybe it was just being twenty-two, stubborn in my own quiet determined way, still very hopeful, and still thinking that nothing was impossible. Or perhaps it was simply a combination of all these things. Anyway I slogged on nonetheless.

Soon I suddenly realized that I was coming to the end of my degree course. Soon there would no longer be the Inner London Educational grant to feed my large family and myself, soon I would have to go out again and face the world to earn a living for myself and my family — my former husband had recommended adoption for our five children, and since I wouldn't agree to this, he washed his hands of us. I saw him only a few times in over ten years, so whining to him for help would only result in his repeating his famous sentence, 'I told you I would not be saddled with five kids'. It is a pity that he is one of those who believe that babies would always remain babies. Still I have to thank him. For many years

later, a Professor friend I met in Chicago said to me, 'I bet if your ol' man didn't give you a kick in the ass, you probably would not have written'. I still think she was right. Because maybe after my degree I would have simply settled back in my secure civil service job and dreamt of becoming a writer one day. Day dreaming is not new to me. I enjoy it, even as an adult. When things become intolerable, I retreat into myself, and can spend months just looking into vacancy and dreaming away. My life would have been like that if I had had a happy marriage. That is why I can now forgive everybody. That is why I am not bitter any more. The realization of all this came much later. When I was nearing the end of my Sociology course in London, I was bitter, I was violent in my words, because I could see no hope for myself and for the children I loved and was determined to give a good start in life, because they were mine.

My failure to get my writing appreciated hit me frontally at this time. I would get an Honours degree in Sociology, then what? Go back to the British Museum and start working again among the Mummies? Not on your life, I was not going to do that. Go back to Nigeria? The war in Biafra was then on, and anybody remotely connected with the Ibos was not then sought for in Nigeria. The only brother I have told me in a letter that being born in Lagos, coupled with the fact that we all speak Yoruba like natives, almost made him forget that we were Western Ibos. But Nigeria reminded him of the fact. Indirectly he made me aware of being an Ibo, a fact which I too was then stupidly playing down and hoping that being a Nigerian was enough for me. Well, thank God, all that is now becoming a thing of the past. Politicians can be trusted to bring up the tribal issue, but we all hope that soon people will have become so educated and touch their hearts each time the Nigerian National Anthem is sung. I am not blaming anybody for this, because Nationalism as it is known in the Western world is a novel thing for us. But we are catching up, and fast.

Anyway, as I was saying, this only brother I have had not written to me for over a year, and I had given him up for dead. I did not then know that he was living somewhere in the bush. My in-laws and ordinary relatives? They had probably crossed me off as a bad debt, for doesn't everybody love a winner? Who in his right senses wants to put up with a relative who has five screaming babies and doesn't know what she wants to do? So all that was left for me was me, my children, and the English editors and publishers.

I changed my style of writing. My language became pragmatic, almost insulting. I became bitter, I started to write about my everyday life,

pouring my aggro out on paper. I didn't care for form. I didn't have to think about the words. They just came, my daily life on paper. I started first of all in a diary, then I realized that those large page diaries were too small to contain my bitterness and my hurt. I poured it all into exercise books, and in the evenings, after doing my revisions, I started typing them. Social realities I called them.

As I said earlier, I never learn from my mistakes. One evening one of the few friends I had at the time came. And instead of my trying to think of some witty conversation to amuse him, I almost drove him crazy by reading my 'observations' or 'Social realities' to him. I didn't know that he was listening, but I had come to the stage where I didn't care. I knew that after that day I would not see him again anyway, so what did I have to lose. He listened patiently as he sipped his tea. Then he said, 'There is a crazy Englishman who has taken over a paper called the *New Statesman*; why not send him your observations. I am sure he will read them.' He left shortly after this, not bothering to tell me whether my work was good or not.

But I did not despair; what had I to lose anyway? I know he made the suggestion by way of ridicule. Yet I was prepared to put this to the test. I typed out the first three 'observations', sending one every Tuesday when I went to the Post Office to collect the children's Family Allowance. I could not afford the postage otherwise, and felt guilty in a way. Because in England, the Family Allowance, now called Child Benefit, just a few pounds, is specially intended for the use of the children. But my argument was, well, if I ever become a writer, they would gain more. So I felt justified in spending those three penny pieces in posting my observations instead of using them to buy the kids a pound or so of potatoes. The first week nothing happened, not even a rejection slip was sent. That was very odd. Because each manuscript usually came back the following Friday. Undaunted, I sent another one; nothing. Still I sent the third one, and it was then that I think the poor man or whoever was receiving them sent me a note saying that he was amused and interested in my 'Observations of the London Poor'.

I screamed with joy until I almost lost my voice. I was going to be a success at long last! I showed the letter to all my friends at the college and tried to tell the children what was happening. They were too young to understand, but they were happy with me. Well, they couldn't help it, they had no choice, because I was all smiles and singing away at my work. Success, success at last.

Then I waited, first week passed, nothing. second week, nothing. By

the sixth week, I could hardly face my friends who only weeks before had started calling me a writer. They told me that the man who signed the letter was a big man, a former British MP, and an intelligent man in the former Labour government ... they told me all sorts of things about him. I guess that was why I was nice enough to wait six weeks before taking the bull by the horns.

The children were particularly trying that morning. After packing them off to their day nurseries, I came back to the flat. The day was damp, and not all that warm. I tried to heat the place up with my old paraffin heater, only to realize that I had run out of kerosene. But the heater let out a choking smell that paraffin heaters are well known for. To let out this impure air, I had to open the windows, and that brought in more cold air, and drops of rain. I was given an old flat, that befitted my poor position. One gust of the wet air stirred the native African woman in me. 'Who the hell is this man that has kept me waiting all these weeks after sending such an encouraging note?' If I had had a telephone, I probably would have telephoned him. But since I had none, and since I couldn't go to the college that day because I knew the lecturer was going to start asking me how far I had gone with my book, I decided to find the office of the magazine myself. Even though people had told me that he was a big man and all that, I was full of anger. And luck was with me. It was on one of those rare occasions when the coast was clear and the stage was set for me. The only person who stopped or tried to stop me was a tea lady or an elderly woman who looked like one. I passed her and followed the direction she gave me to the office of the editor. It was when I was half way down the narrow chokey corridor that she asked me if I had an appointment. It was too late, I was determined to go in, and in I went. The man was not at all pleased to see me, but weeks later his assistant, a very nice lady, came to my flat and we went through my 'observations of London' which by now have acquired another working title of *Life in the Ditch*.

Life in the Ditch is a documentary novel of the daily happenings of my life when I was living in this place officially known as Montague Tibbles in the Prince of Wales Road in London. Many people in Africa have since asked me why such a place I described happened to be in a street belonging to the handsome Prince of Wales? Well, I still do not know the answer, but by the time I moved in there, that particular block of flats was locally known as 'The Pussy Cat Mansions', a place which, by accident or design, looked as if it was set apart for problem families. If one had no problems, the Pussy Cat Mansions would provide problems

for one in plenty. Funnily enough I made friends there. I met social workers like Carol, met desperate women like Whoppey and her mother, and many others who are still my friends. The uniqueness of this place was stranger than fiction, and that was why *Life in the Ditch* was serialized. A few weeks after the lady editor visited me, it started appearing in the magazine.

I was almost like one of those early English poets, I don't remember who, who said that he woke up one morning and suddenly found himself famous. Agents wrote to me, cub journalists wanted interviews, and there followed a series of talks over the radio at Bush House, and at the height of it all I was asked by a Publishing House, 'Barrie and Jenkins', to compile my 'Life in the Ditch' into a book! I thought the excitement of it all would kill me. Well, it didn't. There were months of going through this and that, for I never realized until then how long it takes to produce a book.

After the serialization of *Life in the Ditch* in the *New Statesman*, the council gave me an ultra-modern flat in Regents Park. And all the tenants at Pussy Cat Mansions were rehoused. To think that these very tenants had been agitating for better conditions for over ten years! Maybe there is some truth in what they say, that the pen is mightier than the sword. And that the pen should come from a young African woman, for whom English is not her first, or second, but fourth language, was something. Pride came into it, and all my fellow ditch dwellers got flats of their choice. It was a pity to learn that years later many of them went back to live there. They were so used to the friendliness that poverty brings that they could not cope with other places. But by then the Pussy Cat Mansions had been renovated and given a posher name. They now have a proper heating system! Just think of that.

I remember very well the day *In the Ditch* was ready. The publisher telephoned me. (By now I had a telephone.) Not only was the book ready, but another Woman's Magazine called *Nova* was going to serialize it again. I had just put on a kettle for tea when the phone rang. I forgot about the kettle and was brought back to reality by the smoke that was coming from the kitchen. I did not mind about this. I wanted to see my first book and could not wait for the post. I took a bus and went to the publishers myself and was presented with six sparkling copies of *In the Ditch*.

I had come a long way, and only people who had set their hearts on achieving something and eventually getting it would realize how one feels at a time like this. I have always compared the feelings I have for my

books on their first appearances to the ones I had after going through labour pains and then being left for a few minutes with my brand new baby. I don't know whether other mothers do this, I always make a little speech to my new child, then strip it completely naked to make sure it is perfect. I just do not trust those smiling nurses, they could be hiding something from me. And when I'm perfectly sure that all is well, then I thank the Lord, and smell my child. I don't know whether people notice this, but a new child has that special natural smell which is unique and which always reminds me of the smell our farmers in Ibuza usually bring with them from the farm. It is like that of forest fire, mingled with rain and human sweat. I love it, and still cannot put up with over-washed people. A new child smells like that before it is washed. And somehow, in my imagination, my new books smell like that. That is why I know that the most workable birth control I shall ever have is writing. As long as I keep writing, I will not produce any unwanted babies. And it is working. All this sounds outlandish, but how much of ourselves do we really know?

In any case, *In the Ditch* brought me a modest fame, and it soon went into paperback. I had praise at first, then all of a sudden the cynics started to make remarks like, 'If you say you are that educated, how come you find yourself "In the ditch"?' — and even some of my fellow students started to be funny at my expense and kept asking me, 'Why don't you publish in Nigeria?' Some were even saying that I got my own way because I was young and a woman. Oh, I could go on and on. But one of the most painful, albeit now humorous remarks came from the top people I knew at the time. I came across this recommendation of myself by chance. It read something like this, 'Buchi is a young and intelligent African woman, but still has to learn a great deal about self control'.

Well, that did it! I broke off with those first publishers and had nothing to do with them, but still kept my agents Curtis Brown. But you see, maybe there is something in what that Big Man said. I still have to learn about self control. Because even now when I am happy, I am really happy, and God help anyone around me who is feeling moody, and when I don't get things going my way, I don't like to describe myself. Luckily I am trying very hard to control the latter feeling.

Many journalists have asked me if it would have been different if I had been in Nigeria. I do not know the answer to this one either. All I know is that Nigeria kept copies of *The Bride Price*, some parts of *In the Ditch*, and *The Dilemma* for over six years. I used to send some of my early works to them. But in Nigeria they say you have to know people. In England you do not have to know people, but for a woman, and a black

one at that, your work has to be a step ahead of those of the others for it to see the light of day.

Heinemann and O.U.P. are now publishing my works for Nigeria, as I am getting ready to go back to my country and write from there. Well, eighteen years is a long time to stay in another man's country, a country which to me will always be my second home. And maybe there is something in what the Nigerian Manager of Heinemann said to me when he was considering my work for Nigeria. 'I think it's a good thing you are recognized in England and America. Most African writers always find this part of their career more difficult.'

To prove to those who doubted the authenticity of *In the Ditch*, and to cure myself of so many things, I sat down to write my second book, *Second Class Citizen*. I was then on my way to becoming an established writer, but it was far from easy. Nonetheless I believe in the power of the will, and with the help of that Man upstairs of course, one can always achieve one's goal if one is determined enough.

Anthony Nazombe

FOR A SINGER 1981
(Dedicated to JAM)

I dreaded this moment
When those who might have passed you by in the subway
With no more than a glance or a nod at best
Return in droves with cameras, tape recorders,
And notebooks so that nothing is lost.

I dreaded this moment when
The joy of breaking free from parochial anxieties
Mingles curiously with the fear of the feelers of state
Extending beyond the boundaries of country and race
Converging, as enlarged eyes and ears,
On neutral ground to try a mild form of brain picking.

Yes, I feared the moment
When hearing of Nyanda washed abroad,
Ageing lions sharpen their claws,
Rehearse more rumbling roars
And, manes bristling, crouch in wait
For the ill mannered prodigal
Who must return to his mother's dugs.

Yet, in the uncertainty of such moments
Begins the shoring up of one's defences;
For after Western eyes have picked one clean
A mantle of immunity envelops one's frame,
A second skin boots and bayonets cannot breach
A charm to guide one past snoring guards
When the next witch hunt is on.

BOREDOM

The future unwinds
like soot-stained thread
oil from ruined tombs
glues together
feathers of the newly hatched

The octopus relaxes its hold
only to strengthen it again
depths undermine crests
where the aspiring salmon
might leap from

Sea-weeds that the fisherman
once used to make pumice
now gloat over the drowned
tear raw flesh from bones

The future unwinds
above red tinged waves
splashes smother the struggle
of a wingless fly in a silk noose.

EXORCISM

May I not see you again
nor dance to your tune
bound by your spell

I have met you before
in another form
your claws betray you

I was a child then
led by the hand in a sleepwalk
blind to the wreck at your feet

These platforms
the luminous dead wood on your face
make no difference!

A Cultural Note on Okonkwo's Suicide

Critics who seek reasons for the suicide of Okonkwo, the protagonist of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*,¹ are faced with two problems. The first is the cultural enigma the suicide presents to critics who are foreign to the pre-colonial Igbo culture that Achebe presents. The second is literary: how to deal with the irony the event presents, for it is baffling and most unexpected that Okonkwo who, in the past, has demonstrated an incredible amount of courage and determination in facing his enemies (including himself) would consider suicide as a viable solution to the problems of the final moments of his life.

Some critics have sought an explanation in the works of social scientists² as a way of dealing with both problems. However, it is my contention in this paper that the text itself contains answers to the cultural and literary problems. In this paper I will attempt to demonstrate how the Igbo cultural beliefs, fully explained by Achebe in the novel, can help a careful reader to find motives for Okonkwo's shocking suicide.

Throughout the novel Achebe explains that personal achievements and piety are the basic qualifications that anyone who calls himself a man in Umuofia must possess. Piety as it is used in Umuofia does not just mean 'reverence for God or devout fulfillment of religious obligations'; its meaning includes 'dutiful respect or regard for parents, homeland',³ and elders who represent the deceased ancestors. Obviously Okonkwo is an achiever who also shows signs of piety. Therefore he deserves anything but the contemptible death by suicide which leads to his being buried like a dog; but his case is a proof of the maxim, 'Character is fate'.

In terms of achievement (that is before his exile),

Okonkwo was clearly cut out for great things. He was still young but he had won fame as the greatest wrestler in the nine villages. He was a wealthy farmer and had two barns full of yams, and had just married his third wife. To crown it all he had

taken two titles and had shown incredible prowess in two inter-tribal wars. And so although Okonkwo was still young, he was already one of the greatest men of his time. Age was respected among his people, but achievement was revered. (pp. 7-8)

Apart from explaining here what things constitute greatness in Umuofia, the author gives us another hint at why Okonkwo will eventually choose to die suddenly. That is, since achievement is revered and because his father died without it, Okonkwo's fear of failure motivates him to pursue achievement with a religious fervour. Having tasted the joys and glory of achievements up until the time he goes into exile, he considers his failure to achieve as failure in life when he returns to Umuofia. Thus, achievement is Okonkwo's life-spring; deny him achievement and you destroy the life in him:

His life had been ruled by a great passion — to become one of the lords of the clan. That had been his life-spring. And he had all but achieved it. Then everything had been broken. He had been cast out of his clan like a fish onto a dry, sandy beach, panting. (p. 119)

While achievement is what motivates everything Okonkwo does, it also serves as a means of demonstrating his patriotism. His personal victories at wars and wrestling matches earn his clan the epithet, *Umuofia obodo dike*, 'Umuofia the land of the brave' (p. 109). Okonkwo's military achievements made it easy for his clan to obtain quick restitution (of the ill-fated lad Ikemefuna and a young virgin) for the wife of Ogbuefi Udo murdered by Mbaino:

And so when Okonkwo of Umuofia arrived at Mbaino as the proud and imperious emissary of war, he was treated with great honour and respect, and two days later he returned home with a lad of fifteen and a young virgin.... Okonkwo was, therefore, asked on behalf of the clan to look after him in the interim. (p. 12)

It is the clan that sends him to Mbaino and after he makes his report, they are satisfied that the mission has been executed correctly. Neither the gods nor the people are displeased with his exploits so far.

In contrast, when Okonkwo beats up his wife during the Week of Peace, he is reprimanded by Ezeani, the priest of Ani, for Okonkwo's act is so 'abominable' that it 'can ruin the whole clan'. Having been told the enormity of his thoughtless act, Okonkwo is repentant; therefore, he does as the priest asks him to do by taking to the shrine of Ani the next day 'one she-goat, one hen, a length of cloth and a hundred cowries' for a cleansing ritual. This is the first proof of his religious piety.

When Obguéfi Ezeudu warns him to refrain from taking part in the killing of Ikemefuna, Okonkwo is headstrong and 'bears a hand' in the killing of a boy who calls him father. When his friend, Obierika, confronts him with the senseless killing, Okonkwo gives an explanation which amounts to a subterfuge:

'You sound as if you question the authority and the decision of the Oracle, who said he should die.' ... 'But someone had to do it. If we were all afraid of blood, it would not be done. And what do you think the Oracle would do then?' ... 'The Earth cannot punish me for obeying her messenger', Okonkwo said. 'A child's fingers are not scalded by a piece of hot yam which its mother puts into its palm.' (pp. 60-61)

This explanation, which Okonkwo presents as evidence of his piety to Ani and the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves, fails to persuade Obierika; the omniscient reporter is not deceived by it either since he reports, 'Dazed with fear, Okonkwo drew his machete and cut him down. He was afraid of being thought weak' (p. 55). In essence, Okonkwo's explanation to Obierika is an example of how people can use religious practices as a pretext that enables them to pursue private and individual ambitions. We discover Okonkwo's hoax because Achebe's thematic and artistic techniques reveal it to us: from the beginning of the novel, the novelist lets us into Okonkwo's mind so we can know what motivates his particular actions. As Obierika rightly points out to him, the Oracle did not specifically ask Okonkwo to be the one to kill his adopted son. Neither did the people. For the second time Okonkwo commits an 'abominable' act which warrants the warning from Obierika: 'What you have done will not please the Earth. It is the kind of action for which the goddess wipes out whole families' (pp. 60-61). Artistically the warning foreshadows the destruction and exile that follow Okonkwo's killing of Ezeudu's sixteen-year-old son.

By killing his adopted son, Ikemefuna, Okonkwo has committed the highest crime, the killing of a kinsfolk. But unlike the first abomination of desecrating the Week of Peace, he fails to atone for his sin with a sacrifice. He recognizes his mistakes and fasts for two days before resuming his normal duties in the clan; but that is not enough atonement. Blood has been spilt and it should be redeemed with blood — the blood of animals if the sacrifice is voluntarily offered or human blood if the gods demand it. By intuition Okonkwo is tempted to do more than just fast, but again for fear of being thought weak he suppresses the feeling with the following monologue:

'When did you become a shivering old woman', Okonkwo asked himself, 'you, who are known in all the nine villages for your valour in war? How can a man who has killed five men in battle fall to pieces because he has added a boy to their number? Okonkwo, you have become a woman indeed.' (p. 59)

The omniscient goddess, Ani, overhears him and is very certain now (if ever she was deluded) that Okonkwo kills not because he is carrying out ritual process, but because he wants to prove to his fellow elders and to himself that he is not a woman like his father Unoka, who could not stand the sight of blood. Later in the novel the inevitable happens:

The drums and the dancing began again and reached fever-heat. Darkness was around the corner, and the burial was near. Guns fired the last salute and the cannon rent the sky. And then from the centre of the delicious fury came a cry of agony and shouts of horror. It was as if a spell had been cast. All was silent. In the centre of the crowd a boy lay in a pool of blood. It was the dead man's sixteen-year-old son, who with his brothers and half-brothers had been dancing the traditional farewell to their father. (p. 112)

Okonkwo has inadvertently committed a crime. It is a female crime because it has been inadvertent. He must flee from the clan because the crime is against the earth goddess.

Achebe uses the most sensitive imagery to describe Okonkwo's calamity: 'He had been cast out of his clan like a fish onto the dry, sandy beach, panting.' First, what the dry, sandy beach is to the fish (a foreign, unnatural and uninhabitable place) is what Mbanta is to the exiled Okonkwo. Not only is Okonkwo not used to the customs of the people, he considers the men of Mbanta as 'effeminate' (p. 140). Second, the word 'panting' reinforces the trauma and desperation concomitant with exile. In a 'panting' situation, only a second person or party can save a victim. As we learn later on in the novel, it takes the combined efforts of Uchendu and Obierika to put Okonkwo back on the track before he can run towards his goal of becoming one of the lords of his clan. Without the material and moral help of both men, it would have been impossible for Okonkwo to cope with the forlornness and despair that have begun to dominate his life, a forlornness and despair that come through in Okonkwo's thought, 'Clearly his personal god or *chi* was not made for great things' (p. 119).

When we place this authorial comment against what was said earlier on in the novel, when things were working well for Okonkwo ('Okonkwo was clearly cut out for great things'), there seems to be a contradiction. But it appears so because only a few people realize that Okonkwo kills a

kinfolk when he murders his adopted son, Ikemefuna. In addition, Okonkwo thinks to himself that no one knows his real motive when he deals the killing blow of his machete on the sacrificial lad. Ani who sees in secret punishes Okonkwo openly by involving him in an accident in which he kills Ezeudu's son — an incident that unsettles him for life:

The only course open to Okonkwo was to flee from the clan... That night he collected his most valuable belongings into head-loads. His wives wept bitterly and their children wept with them without knowing why....

As soon as the day broke, a large crowd of men from Ezeudu's quarter stormed Okonkwo's compound, dressed in garbs of war. They set fire to his houses, demolished his red walls, killed his animals and destroyed his barn. It was the justice of the earth goddess, and they were merely her messengers. They had no hatred in their hearts against Okonkwo. His greatest friend, Obierika, was among them. They were merely cleansing the land which Okonkwo has polluted with the blood of a clansman. (p. 113)

This way, the prophetic warnings from Ezeani and Obierika are fulfilled. Nearly all that makes Okonkwo an achiever is wiped out. He is to make a new start in life in exile.

Although Okonkwo's killing of Ezeudu's son is inadvertent, it is no accident that Achebe makes the victim the son of Ezeudu, the very old man who goes to warn Okonkwo against taking part in the killing of Ikemefuna. He says to Okonkwo:

'Yes, Umuofia has decided to kill him. The Oracle of the Hills and the Caves has pronounced it. They will take him outside Umuofia as is the custom, and kill him there. But I want you to have nothing to do with it. He calls you his father.' (p. 81)

On the surface, one might regard Ezeudu's warning as helpful since it is intended to save Okonkwo from committing the murder of his adopted son, an act which one believes earns Okonkwo the wrath of Ani. But a closer look at the episode reveals, however, that the warning has dangerous consequences for both Ezeudu who gives it and Okonkwo who flouts it. Considering the ruling passion of Okonkwo's life, to tell Okonkwo that Umuofia had decided to kill Ikemefuna following the pronouncement of their oracle is to excite the warrior into action. You don't tempt a dog with a bone. Even though he can see reason in the warning, he fears what other elders might say if he fails to show up for the ritual killing. In addition, the prior information removes the element of surprise capable of disarming him if he learns of the people's decision without warning.

Ezeudu's action towards Okonkwo makes him a tempter who tempts

an unguarded victim with what he loves most; he provides Okonkwo with the opportunity to prove his manliness through the ritual killing which takes him a step further towards achieving his goal of becoming a lord of the clan. To the people, but not to their goddess Aní, Ezeudu is an unknown traitor because he goes one day ahead of the commissioned lords to divulge the secret of the people and their oracle. However well Ezeudu means, his meeting with Okonkwo is treacherous to the people. We can fully appreciate the gravity of the offense if we imagine what could happen if the warning is given to a less pious and less power-hungry person than Okonkwo; such a person could panic and so reveal the secret to Ikemefuna who could run away. To the humanist the lad's escape is desired, but we are talking about the religious well-being of the people which is at stake. Can it be imagined what would have happened had Jesus been assisted by a traitor of the people to escape Calvary? Although it is painful to think of an innocent child being killed for ritual purposes, yet the killing of Ikemefuna is believed to bring stability to the society and spiritual well-being to the people. Hence, in the traditional Igbo religious beliefs Ikemefuna becomes a sacrificial lamb, therefore a saviour.

It is in this context that Ezeudu, whose warning would have prevented the sacrifice if heeded by Okonkwo, merits the condemnation of the people had they known what he did. In fact, if Okonkwo was not there to deal the killing blow of his machete, Ikemefuna would have been wounded but not killed (p. 55); thus the ritual process would not have been complete. On the other hand, Okonkwo merits condemnation for killing his own adopted son especially because he did so for personal aggrandisement. They both are punished by the goddess, Aní, simultaneously through the single accident that claims the son of one and destroys the life-long ambition of the other. But however grave their punishments are, both men are not completely destroyed. Ezeudu dies before his son is killed. So he is spared the agony of burying a young son; he also has other sons and daughters who can continue to keep his lineage alive. Okonkwo is exiled for seven years after which period he is free to return. He is also blessed with a friend in Umuofia and an uncle in Mbanta who help him to endure the traumas of exile. He finally takes his own life because he never learns to control his inordinate ambition of becoming a lord when he returns from exile.

Until the coming of the white man, Umuofia community appears to be a stable society with adequate legal and moral codes which provide answers to their social and religious problems, namely: killing of one's

clansman, thievery, battering of women, and land disputes. The laws also have provisions for dealing with external aggression like the murdering of a clanswoman by an outsider. Strong men like Okonkwo and the local judiciary of 'masked spirits' known as *egwugwu*, who represent the founding fathers of the nine villages of Umuofia, are responsible for maintaining law and order in the clan. Their authority is never impugned; if anyone dares to challenge it, he is fought by warriors like Okonkwo. This is how Umuofia came to be known as *Umuofia ebodo dike*.

With the settlement of the missionaries in Umuofia comes the first true test of its stability. In spite of its internal weaknesses, many citizens consider the missionaries' settlement as the beginning of the crumbling of that ill-fated society. The real challenge comes when Okonkwo is away in exile. When his friend Obierika tells him about the new religion, he inwardly believes that the missionaries are able to settle because his people 'have lost the power to fight' now that he is not present to give them leadership. Through his answer to Obierika's question, 'Have you not heard how the white man wiped out Abame?' Okonkwo portrays himself as a general who would have provided the military leadership necessary to forestall the victory of the British force:

'I have heard', said Okonkwo. 'But I have also heard that Abame people were weak and foolish. Why did they not fight back? Had they no guns and machetes? We would be cowards to compare ourselves with the men of Abame. Their fathers had never dared to stand before our ancestors. We must fight these men and drive them from the land.' (p. 159)

As soon as he returns from exile, he attempts to fight the missionaries the way he says he would; he leads the *egwugwu* which destroy Mr Smith's church building. Because he succeeds in persuading his people in the marketplace 'to do something substantial' even though 'they had not agreed to kill the missionary or drive away the Christians', Okonkwo once more feels like his old self:

For the first time in many years Okonkwo had a feeling that was akin to happiness. The times which had altered so unaccountably during his exile seemed to be coming round again. The clan which had turned false on him appeared to be making amends.... Okonkwo was almost happy again. (p. 173)

Almost happy indeed! For both his leadership and happiness are short-lived: when his violent challenge of the missionary and the native Christian converts is tested by the British Commissioner whose forces

destroyed Abame, and who now is involved in the present conflict, Okonkwo (with the other elders) becomes as weak and foolish as Abame people whom he earlier on condemned, despite his military preparedness of always wearing the machete and being on the alert. The court messengers arrest him and other elders on the orders of the British Commissioner, and humiliate them in the Commissioner's absence. Okonkwo chokes with hate. He blames others for failing to approve his plan of killing the white man before their arrests. He carries the hate home with him after their release. This is the first time that a man born of a woman has both challenged and humiliated him. So when he kills the head messenger, he does so with hate and as a personal revenge, not for a ritual purpose as he makes people believe when he kills Ikemefuna.

However, it is also true that some of Okonkwo's mistakes are made while he pursues some noble causes — fighting enemies of the clan. Most elders know that the advent of the white man in Umuofia made 'things fall apart' for their community. So they cry out for the removal of the shame. An example of this outcry is borne in the speech of one of the oldest members of Uchendu's *Umuanna*:

'As for me, I have only a short while to live, and so have Uchendu and Unachukwu and Emefo. But I fear for you young people because you do not know what it is to speak with one voice. And what is the result? An abominable religion has settled among you. A man can now leave his father and his brothers. He can curse the gods of his fathers and his ancestors, like a hunter's dog that suddenly goes mad and turns on his master. I fear for you; I fear for the clan....' (p. 182)

That fear for the younger generation and for the fate of the clan is echoed later on in Umuofia by another old man:

'All our gods are weeping. Idemili is weeping, Ogwugwu is weeping, Agbala is weeping, and all the others. Our dead fathers are weeping because of the shameful sacrilege they are suffering and the abomination we have all seen with our own eyes.' '...No clan can boast of greater numbers or greater valour. But are we all here? ... Are all sons of Umuofia with us here? ... They are not.... They have broken the clan and gone their several ways. We who are here this morning have remained true to our fathers, but our brothers have deserted us and joined a stranger to sell their fatherland.... We must root out this evil.' (pp. 182-3)

Okonkwo seizes the call to arms as a welcome opportunity to demonstrate once more his patriotism and valour without discretion. He understands how to 'root out this evil' without regard to the danger that 'We shall hit our brothers and perhaps shed the blood of a clansman' (p. 183). He runs that risk because the head messenger whom he kills is both a black man

and a fellow Igbo man from another clan. In other words, he kills a kinfolk for the third time. As before his act merits condemnation by both men and gods. 'He knew that Umuofia would not go to war. He knew because they had let the other messengers escape' (p. 184). But what finally kills his spirit and hastens his decision to take his own life is the voices of people asking, 'Why did he do it?' This time his act is condemned not just by a few people and in private as on the two previous occasions; it is condemned by the entire assembly of Umuofia men of valour and in a market place sacred to the people.

Okonkwo's death may have marked the passage of a great era in Umuofia, but his suicide is not a sacrifice to his great society. For neither the gods nor the people would consider suicide a form of sacrifice since suicide is an abomination in Igbo society. Okonkwo's death comes because he realizes that he has failed both the people and their goddess, Ani. Though he has the spirit to endure misfortunes such as the loss of his yams during the drought that hit Umuofia, the traumas of exile, and the humiliation of imprisonment, he does so with others. That is, in all three cases, the people are behind him. It is not the fear of what 'the white man whose power you know too well' might do that makes him commit suicide. Rather it is the recognition of the truth of the statement, 'It is more difficult and more bitter when a man fails *alone*' (p. 23) — words of wisdom his father, who is considered an *agbala*, left with him before dying.

NOTES

1. Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (Heinemann AWS, London, 1967). All further references are to this edition and will be included in the text.
2. See Robert Frazer, 'A Note on Okonkwo's Suicide', *Kunapipi* 1/1 (1979, pp. 108-115).
3. *The Random House College Dictionary*, ed. Jess Scrin (Random House Inc., New York, 1975), p. 1005.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o

INTERVIEW

This is the second part of an interview that took place during Ngugi's visit to Aarhus University in December 1980. Interviewers: Jürgen Martini, Anna Rutherford, Kirsten Holst Petersen, Vibeke Stenderup, and Bent Thomsen.

KHP: Can I ask you a few questions about your own work. You are concerned with failures rather than successes. All your main characters set out to do something and they fail in varying degrees.

I don't think I present them as failures. What I try to do is to present human beings as capable of altering their environment. In other words, I do not see human beings as being slaves to their environment. I try to evoke or create human beings who are capable of altering their natural and social environment but at the same time I am aware of the historical limitations under which they are working. In other words, I have not meant to present a Utopia in which all solutions have not only been found but have actually been practised.

JM: You are very successful with your male characters but when you come to female characters they either tend to belong to a very traditional society or to an atypical group like prostitutes. One doesn't find the modern emancipated women that you find in Western literature and in some African literature nowadays, too. Is this something you find difficult to write about or is it a conscious choice on your part?

I like to believe that I am as successful in portraying female characters as I am in portraying male characters. This is what I set out to do. But obviously, whether I have succeeded or not is for the reader to say. But generally in fiction one tries to portray those people who *seem* to be exceptions to the norm, though in another sense they illustrate the norm.

Let me put it this way. What I try to do in my novels is to show the dialectical relationships between various aspects of society and reality. When I take a prostitute I want to show that she is a product of all the forces impinging on that society. She is not really an exception to that society, she is a direct product of the economic and political forces in it. And in the same way when I treat certain forces like love, etc., I want to show that they are affected by all the social forces working on society. To put it more directly, I want to show that things like love, hatred, etc. are by-products of the class forces at work in Africa today. I was asked the other day if when travelling through the Western world I had met with any personal animosity, and I explained to the students that it was not really a question of personal animosity. One needed to understand the class basis of all these attitudes. We must have a scientific understanding of the processes that create them.

KHP: *You started by saying that people are not slaves to an environment, they were capable of changing it. And then you went on to make remarks that I would expect you to make — namely that Wanjia, the prostitute in Petals of Blood was a product of the economic forces or class forces. Those two statements are contradictory. There is obviously an area in between where you move.*

Yes. Maybe. I think I did correct myself and instead of saying slaves to, I said they were capable of acting upon their natural and social environment or of changing it. I try to show human beings as capable of changing their natural and social environment. With that basis of optimism I do try to look at those forces which prevent human beings from being able to change that natural and social environment. But I should have said that it is not that human beings are not slaves to the natural and social environment but that they need not be so. It is possible to enhance the quality of human life and the quality of human relationships.

BT: *I'd like to focus on the difference between A Grain of Wheat and Petals of Blood. A Grain of Wheat is more or less concentrated on a single locality whereas Petals of Blood has a lot of locations and you use the journey metaphor. At the same time there is a shift from Mugo to Karega, and the focus changes from the teacher to the worker. Are these things connected? Does the shift in focus from a single locality mean you are attempting a more international way of looking at social problems?*

I would probably not use the word international. I don't feel that the writer is static, I believe that he is developing all the time; at least I would like to believe that in my case I am developing all the time. My own increasing understanding and appreciation of the forces at work in human society has made me look at themes which I treated earlier in a slightly different way. That is why I think there is this shift in *Petals of Blood* from a concentration on the vacillating psychology of the petit bourgeois to the position of the worker and the peasant, the one alliance of classes which has changed the history of Africa. It is something I am finding out now to be probably one of the faults, not only of my earlier works, but in the works of most of the African writers. Because we come from a petit bourgeois class position we have tended in the past to create peasant and worker characters with all the mentality of the petit bourgeois. You create a peasant and worker character but inject into him or invest him with the particular mentality and outlook of the petit bourgeois class. When we get worker characters who have a firm outlook with a deep philosophy and knowledge of the area around them, then some petit bourgeois critics say 'these are not true workers' or 'these are not really peasants', purely because they have been used to a worker/peasant character in African fiction who has been given another class consciousness, in this case the petit bourgeois class in Africa. I think that my shift, my change of attitude to my characters from *A Grain of Wheat* to *Petals of Blood* may be related to this.

BT: *There is a formal change from a concentration on a central character, which is the bourgeois novel, to a collective centre. Does this reflect the same change in your ideas?*

Yes, it does, although that aspect had started earlier in *A Grain of Wheat*, but it becomes more dominant in *Petals of Blood*. By the time I came to write *Petals of Blood* and, more recently, when I came to write my novel in Kikuyu I had become more and more aware of the classes at work in African society, and I tried as far as I could to get characters representing these different classes. I tried to show them as they act on one another, the dialectical relationship and links between all the characters and of course their relationship with the international and imperialist bourgeoisie.

KHP: *I would like to know to what extent Mau Mau is still a social force or a thing talked about in Kenya today. Is it discussed among the younger generation, or is it confined to your generation?*

I think there is a thing which we might call a collective memory. This collective memory is in a sense what we might call history, and I would say that Mau Mau is still part of the collective memory of the Kenyan people. It is not something which people can forget, it is basic and integral to the history of their experience, just as the Danish people's struggle in the past against feudalism is integral to their collective memory.

KHP: *There are several ways of remembering. You can glorify, you can try to find the forces behind certain movements, you can tend to focus on certain aspects. I once read that there was a tendency to ignore the Mau Mau movement because it presented difficulties for those in power. Is the glorifying aspect the one people tend to focus on?*

Obviously different classes interpret their history in different ways; in other words, a historical event will later be interpreted by different classes to meet their different class needs. Let me give you a good example. The other day I was talking about Karen Blixen. Somebody said that she was even given the Hans Christian Andersen prize. So I said to myself, 'Oh, yes, this is a way in which a ruling class tries to appropriate the past healthy traditions of a people by giving Karen Blixen an Andersen prize, when the two ideologies are totally in conflict. It is an attempt to make Karen Blixen look as if she is the inheritor of the Andersen tradition in Danish culture and to make it look as if she is part of the linear development of that tradition.' So two totally different writers assume two totally different world outlooks. So in the same way, different classes in Africa will interpret history differently according to their different class needs. I am quite sure there are some people in Africa who are totally opposed to the whole notion of Mau Mau and the remembrance of it, but on the other hand the masses of the people want to be reminded. I will give you an example. The other day I saw a Swahili version of a play called *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, written by myself and Micere Mugo. It was performed for the first time, and the house was almost completely packed. Even when we went to some rural areas people would flock from miles around to see the play, and you could tell that they were identifying with the issues in the play. One of the most

moving commentaries was by a politician who during the Mau Mau had been sentenced to death. It was probably his age which helped him to escape the rope. When he saw the play he burst out weeping. I would say that there are some people who are proud of that heroic tradition, and there are others who obviously feel uncomfortable about it, and in Kenya this has found its way into literature. There are in fact in Kenya two literary versions of Kimathi. There is *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, written by Mugo and myself, and there is another play called *Dedan Kimathi*, written by a Kenyan who shows a different Kimathi. Kimathi has been interpreted in literature in very different ways, and I am sure there are some people who like the Kimathi in my version and some who like the Kimathi of the other version.

KHP: *If you look at the Mau Mau movement from the very beginning, it looks as if it was more or less a cry of a suppressed people who at the beginning had no programme except to fight the colonists. Do you think that this sort of thing could happen in Kenya today?*

I don't really know that. In terms of the Mau Mau not having a clear programme I think that this is slightly erroneous in the sense that it has been based on inadequate research. Now a number of things are coming to light, and I would like to recommend to you a book of Mau Mau songs called *Thunder from the Mountain*. It is a collection of Mau Mau songs, pre-Mau Mau and songs developed during the actual guerrilla warfare. I think that the book gives a clear picture of the ideological development in the Mau Mau movement which runs counter to the previous interpretation of Mau Mau. The book is even more important because the ideology arises from the songs themselves and not from what the writer says. One must remember that Mau Mau was the first modern anti-colonial guerrilla movement in Africa. The Algerian war came after Mau Mau, as did all the other liberation movements. It was even more important because the Mau Mau guerrillas were completely surrounded by enemies. Unlike Mozambique, which had Tanzania as a base, or Vietnam, which had North Vietnam or China, Mau Mau had to depend entirely on its own resources, on the ammunition which they could snatch from the British enemy forces.

KHP: *You said that workers and peasants could change history. Why then did Mau Mau not change history?*

They did change history. History does not move in a straight line. People take three steps forward, then maybe a step backward. Mau Mau has changed the history of Kenya, possibly the history of Africa.

KHP: Is it perhaps not a problem that the movement was a one-purpose movement whose aim was to throw out the English?

If you say that the most important aspect in 20th-century history is, broadly speaking, the struggle between imperialism and anti-imperialist forces, then Mau Mau becomes a very important aspect of this struggle. Imperialism has two stages; the colonial and the neo-colonial. The colonial stage has to be fought before the neo-colonial stage can be fought.

KHP: I have always thought that the Mau Mau movement must have been the touchstone of Fanon's theory.

Fanon, of course, had his own experiences in the Algerian war against the French, but no doubt other movements like Mau Mau were behind his theories. All we can say is that in Africa the struggle continues, and therefore the dreams of the likes of Fanon, Kimathi or Nkrumah, Cabral and all the others have not really died, because they are ideals to be achieved.

Book Reviews

CURRENCY'S DECADE: A TRIBUTE

In March this year Currency Press celebrated ten years of publishing Australian plays by launching *Contemporary Australian Drama*, a collection of essays which deals with historical as well as critical perspectives since 1955.¹ In tracing and bringing into focus the main currents of thought and critical studies of twenty-five years of dramatic writings, the book demonstrates not only the consistently high quality of Currency publications, but also the debt of Australian drama to the determined efforts of Currency's directors, Katharine Brisbane and Philip Parsons. Publishing does not create good literature, but it influences it in several ways. Availability of play texts means critical studies and research, and a continuous debate; it means teaching of the texts in secondary schools and tertiary institutions, and an increased awareness on the part of the general public.

Currency Press published about ninety Australian plays in the last decade, a remarkable achievement; considering the financial uncertainties of publishing exclusively in an art form which is still considered the step-child of Australian literature. Moreover, although the 70s saw a hitherto unrivalled growth of dramatic writings, the development of our indigenous theatre is still hampered by a traditional tendency to distrust the quality of local products, and by a cultural concentration in a few major cities.

The success of Currency Press is due to hard work, a thorough knowledge of the field, and a strong belief in the merit and quality of Australian drama and its important place in our culture. Currency's strength shows in the judgement of the directors in choosing the texts, and the presentation of the texts chosen; in short, in the quality of the published work as a whole.² The majority of the 90 or so plays appear in the series, *Currency Plays*, which deals with contemporary drama. The texts are accompanied with photographs and cast lists from the productions, and notes where further comment or information are necessary. The excellent Introductions, many of which are written by the General Editor Katharine Brisbane, are of a consistently high quality in their critical discussion of the plays.³ While keeping a discerning critical eye on the material, the Introductions promote the merits of the texts, point out their value as literary texts as well as pieces of work written for the theatre, discuss the play, when applicable, in relation to other plays by the same writer, and set it in context with its contemporary scene. However, the Introductions are not specifically aimed at scholars or students, but written primarily with the general public in mind. In pointing to and discussing the Australianisms, the stereotypes or the social aspects, the Introductions propose to raise the interest and brighten the understanding of the general theatre going and reading public, thus generating a wider awareness of Australian drama and its place and purpose in society. With awareness and understanding come more buyers and more audiences. Ms Brisbane says that the aim of the Introductions is to present to people who are not used to reading

plays Australian characters and situations they can relate to.⁴ In pointing to particular aspects of the Australian character and nature, the Introductions play a significant part in heightening the awareness of Australian traditions and culture.

Australian modern theatre needs to be given perspective by the dramatic activities which preceded it. Currency's *The National Theatre* series has done more for the understanding of our dramatic heritage than any literary survey or book about drama. To date, the series has published six plays which span a period of some eighty years of Australian dramatic writing, from Edward Georgehegan's *The Currency Law* (1844) to Betty Roland's *The Touch of Silk* (1928). Often, a play would have only one production, and then the manuscript would be thrown away, thus the majority of the early manuscripts are lost. Finding and editing suitable manuscripts have so far been a mixture of tenacious detective work, infinite patience and meticulous scholarship by the General Editor of the series, Philip Parsons, helped by the British Museum, local and overseas libraries and private collections.

The books in *The National Theatre* series are all outstanding examples of the quality of the research and the scholarship involved in this project. The highly informative introductions add value and understanding by discussing the plays in context of their social and cultural period. Historical and biographical comments, reprints of reviews of the initial productions, and discussion of audience expectations and reactions make interesting and entertaining reading.

The National Theatre series is not a classic series in the usual sense but aims to represent plays which have a place in a national Australian repertory. The lack of readily available texts has in the past obscured not only the qualities but even the existence of our older drama, so that in turn we have been deprived of an historical context in which to assess contemporary play writing.⁵ Although there are only six plays so far, the selection of the plays and the long period they span give a good indication of the main currents of early Australian drama. They establish the tenacious identification with British culture and the dependence on traditions of music hall and melodrama as well as the early presence of colonial elements and stereotypes. The melodramas and comedies of the last century tried to define Australian stereotypes and ways of life, but, like other forms of literature, by imposing Australianisms on British characters and traditions. *The National Theatre* series makes us more aware of the fact that the theatre, as well as the romances, convict novels and bush stories, played a significant part in the growth of an indigenous literature, and as such in the development of an Australian consciousness and identity.

The *Theatre Australia New Writing* series is a recent undertaking by Currency Press in co-operation with the magazine *Theatre Australia*. It started with *Theatre Australia* publishing new scripts in the magazine, but the popularity and success of this concept showed the need to expand and reach a wider public; in short, the need to put the plays in the bookshops. Six plays have now been published in booklet form, with a seventh coming out shortly. The title 'New Writing' is consciously chosen in order to keep an option open to include playwrights who have been previously published, but so far the plays in the series are by writers whose work has been produced but not published.

The next ten years will see a continuation of the work Currency Press has done over the past ten years, but also a change of direction. In order to move with the times, they are expanding into other, related areas, and are already launching a series of books on films. A book on the actor and writer Barry Humphries was released in August this year; a book which demonstrates the artistry of Mr Humphries the writer, often overlooked in the enthusiasm of the ingenuity of his talent as a performer.

Ms Brisbane believes that Australian drama may have reached a saturation point and is going to become more conservative for a while. Perhaps the period of excitement and rapid growth is temporarily over and our best plays have been written over the last ten years. But that the panic like demand for new plays and innovative forms of expression is over, is perhaps a good sign. The last years of massive dramatic expansion have eradicated some of the teething problems which all art forms experience during times of changing directions and search for new forms. Our playwrights, rather than slowing down, may settle down. Australian drama has shown, and Currency Press helped demonstrate, that it is capable of combining maturity, innovation and experimentation.

NOTES

1. *Contemporary Australian Drama: Perspectives Since 1933*, ed. Peter Holloway (Currency Press, Sydney, 1981).
2. Katharine Brisbane writes that in choosing the texts, they have to consider the market, and that it is one of her regrets that the majority of plays are so-called realistic; *Theatre Australia*, July 1980, p. 14. (Not because these are of inferior quality: there is, however, an imbalance due to the fact that more experimental plays are less economically viable.)
3. Some of the Introductions are by directors who have been involved in productions, or by academics or specialists in certain fields, with particular interest in and knowledge of the issues concerned.
4. This comment is from a discussion I had with Ms Brisbane in May 1981. I am grateful to her for being so generous with her time. Subsequent comments from Ms Brisbane are from this discussion.
5. The plays in the series are: George Darrell, *The Sunny South* (1883); Louis Bacon, *The Time Is Not Yet Ripe* (1912); Edward Geoghegan, *The Currency Law* (1844); Katharine Susannah Prichard, *Bramby Jones* and *Bid Me To Love* (1927) (double issue); Betty Roland, *The Touch of Silk* (1938); Walter Cooper, *Colonial Experience* (1868). Steele Rudd's *On Our Selection* (1918 adaptation) is expected to be released around Christmas. The dates in brackets refer to time of writing or first production.
6. Philip Parsons, 'General Editor's Preface' to the series, reprinted in each text.
7. The plays are published with assistance from The Literature Board.

The plays in the series are: Mervyn Rutherford, *Departmental* (1978); Clem Gorman, *A Manual of Trench Warfare* (1974); Bob Herbert, *No Names No Puck Drill* (1979); Grahame Bond/Jim Burnett, *Boys' Own McBeth* (1979); John Summons, *Lamb of God* (1978); Roger Pulvers, *Yamashita* (1977). The dates refer to first productions.

8. Currency Press is doing a history of the Australian cinema, in collaboration with Angus and Robertson, and a collection of monographs for the Australian Film Institute.

THREE AUSTRALIAN PLAYS: FROM 1868 TO 1979

Walter Cooper, *Colonial Experience* (1868), Sydney: Currency Press, 'The National Theatre' series, 1979, 59 pp.

David Williamson, *Travelling North* (1979), Sydney: Currency Press, 1980, 88 pp.

Grahame Bond and Jim Burnett, *Boys' Own McBeth* (1979), Sydney: Currency Press, 'Theatre Australia New Writing' series, 1980, 80 pp.

All quotations are from these editions. The dates in brackets refer to first performances.

The second earliest of the plays in Currency Press's *The National Theatre* series, *Colonial Experience* was first produced at the Royal Victoria Theatre in Sydney in 1868. Walter Cooper, journalist, actor, playwright, and parliamentarian, was a colourful participant in the cultural life of the Colony in the 1860s and 70s. Australian-born, his success as a playwright was largely due to an accurate estimation of his audience's expectations and tastes. With a sure and satirical eye for local types and situations, Cooper made full use of the British traditions which dominated the theatre, as indeed all artforms of the time. Comic devices like mistaken identity, well-timed exits and entrances, frequent asides and *deus-ex-machina* solutions are mixed with melodrama's virtuous and valiant heroines and heroes, all with cheerful disregard for unity of form and expression. But the play is also a comedy about life in the Colony, and presents an image of the society in which it was performed. Colonial traits are superimposed on traditional stereotypes, and the story is invented with local situations.

The hero is one Alfred Arkwright, a penniless English gentleman arriving in the Colony to claim his beloved, orphaned cousin Helen, heroine of the play. Their uncle, moneylender Matthew Grudge, is a nasty specimen who has misappropriated Helen's father's will, so which Alfred is heir. Matthew wants Helen to inherit, his son Joseph to marry her, and nobody to know there is any money in fear of competition for her hand.

However, honest Peter Shivel, clerk to Matthew and armed with a copy of the will, and Captain Versatile Fluett, con-man *par excellence*, are both out to thwart Matthew's plans in their different ways. The plot twists and turns its way through lovers' quarrels and villainous scheming; the hero and heroine are tricked by the villains and the villains are pursued by creditors and bailiffs and each other, until the good Peter exposes the genuine will and the true nature of the versatile Captain Fluett. Everybody is, more or less, forgiven by the happy and now rich lovers, and the moral of the play is summed up in Helen's curtain speech on life's experiences in general and colonial experience in particular: 'In the great game of life, Honest Hearts are always trumps' (p. 59).

The main plot is, however, only a vehicle for the main concerns of the play: the portrayal of Colonial Experience. Alfred is a figurehead, the innocent 'new chum' who, totally free of wit and guile, is taken advantage of by those who know how to survive in the new world.

Young Joseph, failed squatter and idle 'gentleman', is the real exponent of the main theme. In a clever piece of dialogue with Alfred, he portrays Colonial Experience in a somewhat ambiguous light. He paints a romantic and adventurous picture of the bushman, while simultaneously conveying the reality of hardship and deprivation; a

picture which would delight the audience who could laugh at him for his pomposity and with him for his wit. In a language spiced with local idioms, Joseph describes an Australian bushscape in which men survive by applying equal portions of swearing, drinking, cheating and hard work, all of which need a good measure of will-power and wit. Joseph has neither, and his pipe, the only sustained use of symbolism in the play, is an ever-present reminder of his experiences in the bush, where 'you must learn to smoke like a lime-kiln' (p.25). So he tries to demonstrate his 'manhood' by constantly asking for matches to relight his pipe, but the fact that his pipe always goes out illustrates his incompetence and failure to master survival in the bush.

However, it is equally obvious that Joseph is no fool of a 'new chum'. Captain Fluent cheats him at cards and makes him steal from his own father to repay the debt, but Joseph wins back from others the money he stole and replaces it with interest. He has a basic honesty which sets in relief the villainous machinations of old Grudge and the Captain. When he is cheated, it is by the best in the business, and he has no problems in manipulating the innocent newcomers. Joseph, on the whole, brings Colonial Experience into everyday life.

Despite its ridicule of certain types and aspects, the play is, on the whole, benevolent to its characters in its comic glance at the fortunes and misfortunes of life in the Colony. The dramatic rules of the time were simple: amuse and thrill, bring excitement and laughter into rather bleak and dreary lives. Grudge is thwarted in his villainous schemes but is forgiven and virtually redeemed by the heroine; that he will continue to live by the misfortunes of the poor seems to be forgotten in the general benevolence of the ending. That Fluent can trick Grudge into buying beer for the voters and make him believe it was worth his while when the election is lost, is not just a sign of the Captain's con-man'ship but part of the moral of the play: villainy must bring delight. Fluent is an ambiguous rogue who continuously gets the better of the dreaded bailiff, but who has to pay his debts to the 'ordinary' working man, the tailor and the shoemaker. He is a loser who is off to new adventures. The election issue, and the ultimate defeat of the villains, although the first is peripheral to the main plot, the second vital, are of equal importance to the moral of the play: they are both part of the audience's revenge for all the victims of the Grudges and the Fluents in society, but theirs is an amused, not a hateful revenge. Colonial Experience was all too real to an audience who did not come to see harsh punishment or the inside of the bailiff's wagon.

Although the reality of Colonial Experience was a far cry from that portrayed in the play, Cooper managed to convey an image of his time which adds to our understanding of the period. Despite its weaknesses of structure and its mixture of form and subject matter, *Colonial Experience* is an interesting play. It is rich in language, its dramatic dialogue shows a sure grip of the comic material, and its exploitation of local as well as traditional material shows that the theatre was alive and kicking, providing an outlet for many of the social and cultural issues of the time.

For those who are familiar with David Williamson's work, *Travelling North* should come as an exciting change. The image of a stereotypical society is rejected for a more complex portrait of human relationships.

Travelling North is about someone actually going through the process of dying. In this process of dying, septuagenarian Frank Brown, communist candidate in Toorak in the '30s, advocate of human rights and equality of the sexes ('You're my companion, not my slave' (p.8)) is confronted with his own tyrannical and arrogant attitudes. Living in 'sin'

with 30 years younger Frances whom he has just met. Frank is still at war with the world in general, and his own children, Frances's daughters, his neighbour and his doctor in particular. Frank likes to be at war with everything; he thrives on the image of himself as the rebel who fights vulgarity and stupidity, and particularly beliefs contrary to his own. He is a man who takes himself and his ideals seriously, a 'know-all' always teaching other people their business.

But Frank is also a frightened old man, afraid to die, afraid of losing his sexual power. In a curious way he and Frances are good for each other. Frances loves Frank because he is selfish and demanding and sick, not despite of it. A middle-aged woman rattled with guilt for the way she feels she neglected her own family, she atones for her selfishness by putting up with Frank's whims and his absorption in himself — up to a point, that is. She nurses him the way she did not her children, but she also leaves him, the way she did her children. The gentle, unassuming Frances can understand the eccentricity of Frank, she herself has always been in conflict between her role as a mother and wife, and her needs as an individual. The play is as much about the growth of Frances as it is about the dying of Frank.

The structure of the play is designed to emphasize the development of the two main characters, from two elderly people who fall in love, to a man and a woman who spend three years discovering themselves through each other. In thirty-three short scenes divided into two acts Frances and Frank's lives are exposed in brief glimpses which juxtapose the cold, unfriendly Melbourne from which they move, with the warm and friendly north where they retreat to live their own lives, free of family intrusion and responsibilities.

The scenes in the small community up north often act out and extend the meaning of the scenes down south. The structure illustrates how people and environment play their different parts in the development of the two main characters. Their increasing self-consciousness and knowledge of self and of each other are highlighted by their reactions to their surroundings and in the way their surroundings react to them. Frances and Frank have to cope with more than a new life with each other, they have to cope with the ghosts of the past, with the ever-present climate of Melbourne intruding into the sunny north.

In the cold south, human relationships, whether concerning man and wife, parents and children, or neighbours for that matter, consist of one long battle for supremacy and recognition; a battle with the Self in focus. Yet it provides revitalization and continuance through culture, marriage and grandchildren. Up north, the climate and the solitude — revitalizing tonics — produce closeness and communication but also Frank's first heart attack, a temporary break-up between him and Frances, and the persistent Freddie, who believes in frequent neighbourhood relations, loud shirts and the glory of the Vietnam war, and who builds them a monumental Aussie barbecue as a surprise.

The arrogance of Frank is highlighted by his contact with Freddie and with Saul, the local G.P. The intruding Freddie is an unselfish little Aussie bantler whose heroic war exploits are never bragged about and whose eagerness to help and refusal to be offended set in relief Frank's rudeness and dogmatic attitudes. The interlude with Saul demonstrate Frank's obstinacy and irritating streak of pomposity. Rebellious against the doctor's methods of treating his heart condition, Frank takes it upon himself to test the variety of drugs in Saul's medical book, only to come to the same conclusion as the doctor's initial treatment, after months of trial and error.

But Frank's stubbornness is also an expression of his thirst for knowledge and his

rebellion against social and professional attitudes which neglect to take the human factor, the individual, into consideration. The preoccupation with his illness and the demands on Frances and his friends are also part of a spirited fight against loss of mobility and death. Frank never gave in gracefully, and he fights the battle his own way. Against doctor's orders he manages to give Frances a second honeymoon and a wedding night worthy of a young man. He leaves not a bottle, but a magnum of champagne ready for the celebration of his death.

Frank mellowed gradually, not just of old age or warm climate, or by being with people who care, but also because he recognizes that he, too, cares for and needs them. Clever use of dialogue and action to complement each other demonstrates the coexistence of the old, stubborn Frank and the new, more flexible one. He admits to his daughter that in his preoccupation with the world in general, he forgot to look at it in particular; but when the exact words are repeated to Frances in a different situation, we suspect that his admission is more a gesture than a humble acknowledgement of guilt or fault. However, the play's actions convey how he gradually accepts his responsibility to the 'particular', to the people around him, and his own need of them. He marries Frances, although he maintains he has never believed in the institution of marriage; Freddie's monstrous barbecue continues to adorn their garden, and Frank participates in the rituals connected with it, he uses the reclining vinyl chair with all its gadgets, vulgar but comfortable.

Ironically, Frank dies in the gadget chair and is toasted by the mourners around the barbecue, symbols of the lack of taste and the adherence to social rituals which he has fought against all his life. But he still has the last word. As Frances, Saul and Freddy drink the magnum of champagne, Frank's dead legs push the footstool down with a sharp sound, causing Saul to voice what they all feel: 'My God. I thought for a second that the old boy had come back. Much as I loved him I couldn't have taken another three years.' (p.88).

Since Bond and Burnett's *Boys' Own Macbeth* opened in Sydney in July 1979 it has been extensively performed; it has been in all the other states, it had a revival in Sydney by public demand, and started a three-month season in Los Angeles in April this year. Its popularity is not difficult to understand; its ingenuity of themes and story, its exuberant and colourful characterisation, its musical numbers, slapstick comedy and satire of the sacred cows of society as well as the theatre make for an entertaining evening of fun and games. But like Bond's outrageous conception 'Aunty Jack', *Boys' Own Macbeth* is cruelly funny. Behind the farcical send-up of the classics, the teaching methods in schools, and the Old School Tie syndrome runs a dark, nearly savage satirical portrayal of corruption on all levels, in personal as well as public affairs.

The effectiveness of the comedy is heightened by a heavy emphasis on audience participation. Constant references to the audience as part of the class involve the spectators to the extent where they even do what the Headmaster tells them. But while the audience responds more readily to the comedy by taking part in it, they also, and uncomfortably, become part of the immature pranks and the manipulations and exploitation; the theatrical mirror is double-sided. Like the play's performance of *Macbeth*, *Boys' Own Macbeth* becomes in itself a play within a play.

As the subtitle says, this is 'A Rotten Tragedy'. *Boys' Own Macbeth* is the destruction and tragedy of *Macbeth* turned into comedy and satire. But the fun and games are always accompanied by a sense of foreboding, of destruction which goes beyond childish pranks.

The colourful dialogue, the musical numbers and the burlesque are undermined by a chilling sense of manipulation and corruption.

In the manner of a Joe Orton farce, the clichés, traditional sex jokes, reversed meanings and grotesque situations become the comic means by which the play satirises the conventions and attitudes of an unhealthy society.

Boys' Own. McBeth is a very clever play about the games people play. The schoolboy antics are funny but also frightening when performed by a 48-year-old father and his 28-year-old sons. It is this incongruity of the characters and their actions which creates the absurd and mock-heroic comedy of the play; a comedy which exposes the grotesqueness of our contemporary society: uncultured, devious, exploitative and immature. The use of homosexuals and Jews as butts for the farce does not make fun of the Gay Movement or the Jewish community but satirises a society which, through fear and ignorance, makes such groups stock figures of fun and ridicule. The play laughs at our concepts of sex and racism, at our prejudices and insularity — for this is the boys' own McBeth.

MAY-BRIT AKERHOLT

Barbara Hanrahan, *The Peach Groves*. U.Q.P., 1979.

Peter Carey, *War Crimes*. U.Q.P., 1979.

Thea Astley, *Hunting the Wild Pineapple*. Nelson, 1979.

Frank Moorhouse, *The Everlasting Secret Family and Other Secrets*.

Angus & Robertson, 1980.

These books illustrate some of the vitality and diversity of recent Australian fiction. *The Peach Groves* is the first of Barbara Hanrahan's novels I have encountered. It made me sorry I missed the four earlier titles, but glad they are still in store for me, for I am very susceptible to her way of telling a story. In this novel, a vividly imagined world of middle-class Victorian families at odds with their passions in the antipodes is disclosed as it impinges on the consciousness of some of its inhabitants, chiefly pre-pubescent Ida, but the narrative is flexible enough to modulate now and again to other viewpoints. Without a trace of awkwardness or the suggestion of force, it generates out of Ida's perceptions a rich cluster of images and symbols which give substance to the story.

Ms Hanrahan handles this mode of subjective narrative, which combines psychological insight with poetic intensity, with great accomplishment. She creates a convincing impression of historical verisimilitude, while discovering in the relation of the story to its setting — a New Zealand summer centred on the celebration of Christmas — a wealth of suggestions and implications. Every detail of the fluently articulated story adds to the sense of mounting passion which breaks through at the end to reveal the vanity of the attempt to transplant nineteenth-century European civilization in the antipodes. The Peach Groves neglected in the wilderness, which give the book its title, focus some of the disturbing implications of this theme, but at the heart of the story is Tempe, the part-Maori girl, whose passion and faith in the power of Nature procures the reverse of European pretensions, in a culminating scene which is a triumph of plotting and symbolism.

This is the book of a gifted writer who reveals through the subtlety of her narrative great insights into the sources of some of the paradoxes of life in the antipodes.

If Barbara Hamrahan traces some of the traumas of white civilization in its antipodean beginnings, Peter Carey prefigures some of its grim endings. *War Crimes* succeeds in maintaining the extraordinarily high standard he set with his first collection, *The Fat Man in History* (1975). He has found a voice and created a mode in which his fertile imagination is matched by a precision and economy of language and narrative invention, capable of finely crafted very brief pieces but at its best in stories sustained over about 30 to 60 pages, like the title stories in both collections and *The Chance, Krutu-Du and Exotic Pleasures* in his latest book. These are true short-stories, which combine density with clarity, yet in their suggestive power they have the weight of novels.

One source of this power is the way Carey's imaginative flights into strange worlds are anchored in a strong sense of social and psychological reality. His visions are like fragments of the familiar world detached from the flow of documentable experience and allowed to drift, yet his narrative is so cunningly paced, and couched in a prose that even in its smallest touches strikes exactly the right note, that it is often difficult to place the point at which a story crosses from familiar experience into the realm of vision or dream.

Peter Carey's re-orientations of experience move in all directions from the axes of realism — backwards, forwards or sideways — but quite a few of the stories in *War Crimes* evoke worlds projected a short distance into the future. Like *The Chance* they sometimes have the flavour of science fiction, but this is coincidental. Carey is essentially an artist with a disturbing vision of the mysterious and unknown in the known, so that even when his stories are set in the future and contain creatures like Fastalogians, their impact is to disturb our sense of the present. He is a writer who senses that our existence is determined as much by possible grim futures as by the past.

After just these two short collections it is possible to speak of a Peter Carey world, which recurs in some, if not all of his stories. It has a strange resemblance to Australia and its inhabitants to Australians. Their distinctive mannerisms are incisively observed, their forms of thought and speech are registered with an exact ear for accent and idiom, they move in recognisable natural settings through an environment of familiar artefacts, yet Carey manages to endow everything with a quality of frightening remoteness and alienation. He is a rare case of a genuinely surrealist writer whose vision is rooted in an exact sense of reality and whose invention is motivated not by gratuitous or merely subjective fantasy, but by an original and disturbing perception of the way the 'ordinary reality' upon which we all depend can deceive us while it seems to reassure us.

Frank Moorhouse's vision, on the other hand, is underpinned by a fine sense of the recent past and an evident wish to recover some of its unrecorded secrets. Previous books developed the discontinuous narrative to the point where it was not simply a string or cluster of stories on the way to becoming a novel, but a distinct and in many ways more interesting form, which, through shifts in angle, focus and narrative mode, can chart a region and milieu in depth, while preserving the intensive economy of the short story. His new book is a fascinating evolution of the genre. Four miniature discontinuous narratives are juxtaposed, adding a further dimension to the world described in his earlier books, its frontiers are extended, connections between its main centres are explored, and new regions discovered.

Secret history has been an incidental theme of some of Frank Moorhouse's earlier writing, exemplified by the pre-occupation (which he shares with Michael Wildgen) with the way stories may be ways of concealing the truth, rather than disclosing it (though they

might then inadvertently reveal something else about their tellers). In this book, secrecy is the central subject and main connection between the four disjunct parts. The theme is explored in a variety of ways: in the first section, Irving Bow, the proprietor of the Odeon Cinema has a secret which he conceals under a verbal fluency which is beginning to show dangerous lapses; the narrator of the second sequence secretly broaches another's family secrets; in the third, despite the narrator's promise of discretion, a secret leaks out; the fourth explores the secrecy which is a condition of life for homosexuals.

This concluding sequence is the title-piece of the book, and it makes the dominant theme quite explicit. This is not homosexuality, nor even sexuality in general, but the way in which life as a public person involves (for most people) private secrets. Not trivial secrets which can be voluntarily kept or revealed, like membership of the Freemasons or the C.I.A., but certain facets of human nature for which society provides no channels of expression. It happens that in the forms of society in which most of us move some of these secrets have to do with sex, and a number of Frank Moorhouse's stories are perceptive accounts of the ways people manage this part of their nature in relation to the public and private dimensions of their lives. Yet one of the successes of *The Everlasting Secret Family* and *Other Secrets* is that it suggests the general implications of this problem while exploring in detail the odd ways in which public values and behaviour shift around it.

This is achieved by combining strong thematic coherence with wide stylistic variation. In each section, the tone and narrative strategy is modelled on the idioms of the milieu portrayed, and this results in many delightful touches, like the exchange between Irving Bow and T. George McDowell on correct cinema etiquette or the discomfiting of Markham by the word *Televisé*. At certain points, however, it runs the risk of being misunderstood, particularly in the last section, where the idiom of homosexual erotica, being for most readers (one presumes) such a highly-charged, taboo subject, it is almost bound to overpower a balanced response to the narrative. Yet Frank Moorhouse seems to run this risk quite deliberately, as if to challenge the reader, and this is completely justified, for without this part of the book the full implications of his theme could never have been developed.

Homosexuals inevitably have secret lives, which not only give rise to fantasy, but are also supported by sub-cultural myths, such as the one about the heritage of their kind in the *Symposium*, the *Phaedrus* and the story of David and Jonathán. *The Everlasting Secret Family* explores a private version of this myth, but goes beyond it in its implications, to suggest that a secret life may be important. It is not always desirable to let it all hang out, not even possible if society does not want to know, and perhaps it is best to live with one's secrets by exploring the space between them and the public personality for its creative potential. That, in a witty and allusive way, seems to be what the book is saying.

The possibilities of discontinuous narrative to open up a variety of suggestions around a theme (rather than exhaust it, as novels are inclined to do) are splendidly explored in Thea Astley's recent book, *Hunting the Wild Pineapple*. It is a sequence of stories told by Keith Levenson, who first appeared as a teenager in *The Slow Nations* (1965). He is now about twenty years older, simply known as Levenson, and adrift in North Queensland recording the human and natural geography of that tropical paradise.

Thea Astley portrays Levenson with great insight, and he emerges as a very complex character who veils his sensitivity with irony, which he sometimes consciously drops, to allow us glimpses of his vulnerability, and becoming self-conscious of this, reverts again to irony. His thoughts and perceptions are expressed in a blend of vivid images, encyclopedic comparisons, knowing allusions to high and low culture, colloquial vulgarisms and

abbreviations and even traces of ockerism he deplores, all of which is simultaneously self-deprecatory and self-conscious. He is a story-teller who draws attention to himself, sometimes apologizing, sometimes explaining, throwing in scraps of learning, aware of the power of some of his own images and symbols and given to brilliant flights of fancy, like his account of the tropical landscape as it would appear to a man who is a professional composer of cryptic crossword puzzles. Yet, at the same time, he is acutely aware of the world around him, with a perceptive sense of human feeling and motive which amounts to empathy. He calls himself a 'people-freak', betraying with the word itself something of the defensive manner in which he cloaks a sensibility which can be painfully aware of others' feelings even as he presents their behaviour as comic.

Levenson is developed convincingly both as narrator and character through a sustained and elaborate interplay between his role and the form of the book. Given his sensibility, and his complex and self-conscious personality, story-telling comes to him as a natural, and indeed essential activity. It is a process of self-discovery and integration, of coping with his anxieties and expressing his powerful sense of awareness and vivid imagination. Whether his stories circle around himself, depict the peculiarities of society in his tropical Eden or are visionary accounts of other lives, they reveal the inner complexity of their narrator. 'Let me draw you a little map' he says at the beginning, and from then on, the book is pervaded by images of maps and exploration, but in providing the reader with a lively map of the North Queensland coast, Levenson charts his own emotional and spiritual geography.

Hunting the Wild Phoebe is a fine imaginative achievement. Through the creation of Levenson, who is placed at the heart of the book, Theo Askey integrates it into something more than a cluster of stories, and captures the life and landscape of another region of Australia with great originality.

BRUCE CLUNIES ROSS

Patrick White, *Flaws in the Glass: A Self Portrait*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1981.

Flaws in the Glass is a welcome book, for White does not appear very discernibly in his novels; he remains a reserved personality there. Furthermore, the contemporary world does not appear much in his writings other than in the two Sydney novels *The Peaseblossom* and *The Eye of the Storm* and some of the short stories, so that one looks to the self-portrait in order to determine his relationship to the contemporary world. It is in this respect that the self-portrait is most successful, especially in its third section, which is a rather loosely ordered collection of White's reactions to people and events in Australia over the last decade.

Here he speaks of the various celebrities — writers, painters, theatre people, men in government — whose lives touch his because he is the most distinguished of Australian writers and comes from an affluent Sydney family. He introduces this section with an account of a luncheon with the Queen when she visited Australia in 1963; he speaks unkindly of her, perhaps feeling that she paid him insufficient attention and may not have read the copy of *For* he had been assured lay beside her bed. In what amounts to an extended Gossip Column he goes on to write of his friendship with Sidney Nolan and

theatre director Jimmy Shorman (who has paid much attention to White's rather mediocre plays). Despite White's extensive list of notabilities and touting of his friendships, his contacts seem surface rather than close; he does not succeed in conveying an image of himself as a warm person, but then Australia is not a warm society. His story of his quarrel with the Kers is ugly because it could ruin their career. White recounts his part in the Moore Park affair probably because it represented his entry into public life, in a successful bid to prevent the demolition of his street in favour of a giant sports stadium. He also gives an account of the day that he learned of his Nobel Prize in 1973. These indulgences in vanity are harmless enough, much more acceptable than the snobbery that also emerges in this part of the book; but what is important is that we have a picture, however incomplete, of White's social and political life.

Along with Joyce and Faulkner, White is one of the greatest novelists in English in this century, so one considers very seriously whatever he has to say about himself. What kind of a man could write novels so disparate as *The Tree of Man*, which is so sympathetic to its two main characters, and *The Tynburn Affair*, which is so lacking in sympathy for any of its characters? Either there has been a darkening of vision over the 23 years that separate the two works or White is a man contending with unreconciled contraries. Acting against the former interpretation is the chronology of his more positive novels: they appear late (like *The Eye of the Storm* and *A Fringe of Leaves*) as well as early. One is also struck by the fact that in his middle period (1961 to 1970, *Riders in the Chariot* to *The Fiddler*), in which he portrays various kinds of visionaries, he strips these visionaries of any personal attractiveness or dignity even as he endows them with an exalted sense of vision. One is driven to the conclusion that White is a man of unreconciled contraries, rather like his own Theodora in *The Aunt's Story*. From the novels we come to *Flame in the Glass* hoping to find evidence of the cause of these contradictions or a final resolution of them. We find neither clear cause nor resolution of the contraries, but rather corroborating evidence of them.

Of the contraries that persist in dividing White two are especially striking: the opposition between his egalitarian sentiments and his snobbery, and the opposition between his spiritual aspirations and his immersion in the cruder aspects of physicality. White writes a good deal in the first part of the book about his long friendships with the family servants and on one occasion describes an affectionate crying jag between him and Eliza, 'two such simple souls'. This simple man, however, is at odds with the social lion who parades his distinguished acquaintances in the Gossip Column section. The picture we get in *Flame in the Glass* of a man divided between a love of unsophisticated people and a cultivation of the *haut monde*, though, is maybe more accurate than the one we get from the novels, where he seems to reject the mass of humanity. The White of the novels may be blacker than the White of everyday life.

The other opposition in White is between his spiritual and aesthetic sensitivity on the one hand and his obsession with the crudities of human physicality on the other. Even as he exalts the spiritual vision of such characters as homely spinsters and idiots and responds to the bejewelling effects of sunlight on preserved cumquats and of moonlight on furniture he presents an array of farting characters such as we do not meet in any other serious English novelist. It is not a sufficient artistic justification to say as White does in this book, 'Well, we do fart, don't we?' He himself exempts his visionaries from the need to fart, which suggests the very opposition between spirituality and physicality that we have noted. Perhaps White harbours a resentment that life does not measure up to its highest possibilities.

White is a man of many fragments, as he acknowledges within the self-portrait. The book lets us see some of his several lives more directly: the dead inside him (his parents and some deceased friends) and the living conflicts. Although he calls himself vain, his writing of this book is more a gesture of humility than an indulgence in vanity. White, unlike so many famous people who write their own biographies, does not try to vindicate his life, but is content to reveal an imperfect human being.

ROSE MARIE BESTON

Bruce King, *The New English Literatures: Cultural Nationalism in a Changing World*. Macmillan. 248 pp.

Yasmine Gooneratne, *Diverse Inheritance*. Centre for Research in the New Literatures in English. 173 pp.

The writing of broad literary historical surveys becomes ever more difficult and ever more dubious an undertaking. It is bad enough with a single country's literature. It is harder still to deal with that of several, as does Bruce King in this latest attempt at Commonwealth Literature, a now slighted term but still the best we have for what we mean by it. For though Professor King's title avoids the phrase and adopts its fashionable successor, there is, let us not deceive ourselves, a note of condescension even in the word 'new'. And there are many, I know, of my friends in the Commonwealth who would not thank him for his sub-title either with its implications of a certain parochialism.

I find that sub-title both accurate and confidently substantiated in his third chapter 'New literatures and nationalisms'. In that chapter King shows both the necessary initial dependence upon metropolitan culture and the several ways in which Commonwealth writers have adapted that culture in the creation of their own. His references to pioneering literature are some of the best in the book. Undoubtedly and understandably the metropolitan heritage is suspect and has often been rejected, but Nanga in *A Man of the People*, whom King quotes, reminds us of the unwisdom and indeed frequent mere consciousness of such a stance. Nevertheless, it is true, as King observes, that there are other important strands, not least in African literature.

King's method is not to try to cover everything, but by judicious selection and extended treatment to deal with authors whom he finds both representative and crucial to his theme. Thus we have Achebe, Soyinka, Naipaul, Harris, Walcott, Brathwaite, Sargason, Narayan and Robertson Davies with a final chapter on Guerrillas, *The Adaptable Man* and *Heat and Dust*. I have omitted the Australian chapter which he sub-titles 'Richardson to A.D. Hope and the middle class'. That sub-title will illustrate his difficulty and him; his inevitable shortcoming. Similarly, for this reviewer Narayan was not enough for India nor Robertson Davies for Canada, and other readers might, for instance, have other names than Naipaul and Harris for the West Indies. This is simply to show the magnitude of the task and the possibility of other paths up the mountain. Nevertheless, and despite occasional errors (surely R.A.K. Mason is known for other things than Georgian verse; and 'mateship', not 'matesmanship'), Bruce King has provided interesting vistas from the peak.

If Bruce King attempts the panorama, Yasmine Gooneratne works minutely in the village on the plain — or rather in two of them, for her diverse inheritance is principally concerned with Sri Lanka of which she is a native and Australia where she has settled with an occasional look from the one across to India, more briefly still from the other to New Zealand. Like King's, her title is also worth stressing. It is a diverse, not a divided, inheritance, and the book displays all the sense and sensibility of one who has written so perceptively of Jane Austen and her novel of that name.

The danger of writing several essays on an area so small in comparative Commonwealth terms as Sri Lanka is that the result might appear local and provincial. Mrs Gooneratne does indeed bring out the local in her feeling both for geography and history, but, like Jane Austen with her villagers, the outcome is not parochial but a sense of the universal within the particular. She extends the Sinhalese outwards. Her essays on Sri Lanka cover past and present, British and native, literary and political. For the rest, she has chapters on Douglas Stewart's 'The Silkworms', this a sustained piece of practical criticism, David Campbell and Jhabwala's *Heat and Dust*. Her criticism is balanced, enlightened and enlightening.

ARTHUR POLLARD

Jürgen Schäfer, ed., *Commonwealth-Literatur*. Düsseldorf, Bagel/Bern & München, Francke, 1981. 244 pp, SFr.26.00 (Studienreihe English, Vol. 43)

This is a welcome book. It is likely to be most serviceable to readers who are new to the subject, who feel the need for a sketch of the whole territory and who seek encouragement to read more. Of course most of it has been said before — but perhaps not in German, or not so well.

The main body of the book consists of eight chapters. The editor devotes a chapter to a detailed discussion of certain theoretical preliminaries concerning the 'new' national literatures in English. Then there are chapters on Australia (Freisnitz), New Zealand (Wattie), Canada (Goetsch), the West Indies (Breitinger), South Africa (Edmonds), West and East Africa (Riemenschneider) and India (Silla). Smaller regions are not dealt with, which leads to the exclusion of a few very good writers like e.g. Albert Wendt.

Of course there are questions of emphasis, but this may be mainly a matter of personal taste. Sometimes colonial literature is dealt with at great length at the cost of contemporary literature. The Australian section e.g. does not mention Les Murray, David Williamson and Frank Moorhouse, which means that an exciting segment of Australian literature has been excluded. And the beginning student's view may become lopsided when ten lines are devoted to Stuart Cloete, while Margaret Laurence gets a bare mention of her name. There are further slight inconsistencies: there is a lengthy section on Anglo-Indian literature, but no mention of Jean Rhys in the West Indian chapter. There is a section on Franco-Canadian writing, but hardly any reference to Francophone writing from Africa or non-English literatures of the West Indies.

This book may be more useful to the beginner than the similar books by Walsh, Bruce King and the earlier German effort by Kosok & Priemnitz because of the inclusion of a thirty-page bibliography (which does not list texts mentioned in the main body of the book, but important anthologies, series and secondary material). My primary criticism here is of the editing: Why are the national sections differently organized and why different things included? e.g. the New Zealand bibliography is divided into two parts only, the African section has some thirty sub-divisions. Some refer to books only, others to articles in journals and even dissertations only available on microfilm. In spite of this the bibliographies are genuinely useful (even when some titles are absent that one would have expected to find, like Narasimhaiah's *The Swan and the Eagle* or the books on the African novel by Palmer and Cook, Judith Wright's *Preoccupations* or Gray's *Southern African Literature*).

The proof reading in the main body of the book is good and there are very few typos (e.g. G. W. Desani, and the name of Alf Wannenburgh is constantly misspelled). Far less care has gone into the footnotes, the bibliography and the index. On p. 201 the editor of the present volume is made into Jürgen Schäffer, on p. 193 there is a reference to Bruce when Bruce King is meant. And I wonder if Ngugi ever wrote under the name Ngugi Wa Tiropo. I do not know if Larson changed the title for the second edition of his study on African fiction, but it was certainly published at Bloomington and not at Indiana, as Kesting's book was published in Milton, Qld. rather than Hongkong. And is the title of the book edited by Ramson not *English Transported* rather than *Transported*? These are examples and not an exhaustive list of mistakes.

I think that there are about two dozen dubious dates in the book. Was E. S. Prichard not born in 1883 (not 1893), Xavier Herbert in 1901 (not 1911), Arthur Nortje in 1942 (not 1946)? Was *Capricornia* not published in 1938 (not 1937)?

I have another quarrel with the editor about the index: With some authors as many first names as possible have been hunted out, e.g. Edward Fairly Stuart Graham Cloete, while others receive initials only (e.g. C.J. Driver). Why not use one system throughout? And if full names are given, why not use brackets to indicate under what names these people normally published their books, e.g. Edwin (John) Pratt, (Theodore) Wilson Harris, etc.?

But these are minor flaws in a work which will surely be immensely valuable to German students of Commonwealth literature.

KLAUS STUCKERT

Bruce King, ed., *West Indian Literature*. London: Macmillan, 1979. 247 pp. £6.95.

The critical emphasis of book-length studies of Caribbean literature has shifted in recent years from introductory surveys and overviews, such as Louis James's *Islands in Between* (1968) and Ivan Van Sertima's *Caribbean Writers* (1968), to studies of individual authors like Hema Maes-Jelinek's and Michael Gilkes' of Wilson Harris, Landeg White's and

Robert Morris's of V.S. Naipaul, Louis James's and Thomas Staley's of Jean Rhys, and Robert Hammer's of Derek Walcott. Given this current critical trend (an indication surely that individual Caribbean writers now have substantial canons and deserve full-length treatment), *West Indian Literature*, a collection of essays by various hands intended as an introductory survey, comes as a surprise — but then, such popular literary surveys (the book belongs to the Macmillan series on new literatures written with the 'general reader' in mind) are periodically necessary. As the editor says, these essays were commissioned because it was felt that 'an up-to-date introduction to Caribbean literature in English' was needed. 'There is still an insufficient body of useful commentary and historical information readily available for the general reader and student.' Adhering to the requirements of the Macmillan series, *West Indian Literature* seeks to provide a survey of the literary history which relates the creative writing to the social and historical background and offers concise introductions to major authors and briefer assessments of secondary and younger writers. Notwithstanding its intractable unevenness and lack of cohesion (not altogether unexpected in a work in which many have participated), the book serves its purpose well.

It has two parts. The first is a socio-historical introduction to and a chronological survey of West Indian literature in five chapters entitled 'The Background', 'The Beginnings to 1929', 'The Thirties and Forties', 'The Fifties', and 'Since 1960: Some Highlights'. The other chapters discuss individually six novelists (Edgar Mittelholzer, Samuel Selvon, George Lamming, V.S. Naipaul, Wilson Harris, and Jean Rhys) and two poets (Derek Walcott and Edward Brathwaite). Bruce King gives a brief preface to these thirteen chapters which is essentially an outline of the various essays and a brave attempt at imparting some continuity and cohesion to the book.

The first essay, by Rhonda Cobham, provides the reader in twenty pages with a quick sweep of Caribbean history and even manages to squeeze in discussions of events considered significant to Caribbean literature (such as the exposure of the early writers to European society during the war) and of the various peoples and groups of the Caribbean (the East Indians, the Rastafarians, the Black Power advocates, for instance). She draws as much from the creative writers' journals and autobiographies as from historical works for her information. The four subsequent chapters which constitute the chronological survey focus on the secondary writers; the major authors (who have separate chapters to themselves) are not discussed here. This, supposedly, was to avoid repetition and duplication, but it distorts the chronological survey and makes dubious its usefulness. Moreover, some of the secondary authors who appear in these chapters and whose creative lives span several decades (Claude McKay is one) are subjected to piecemeal treatment when their careers are chopped up chronologically and distributed among the various chapters and critics.

The different approaches and emphases of these four chapters point up the lack of continuity and cohesion. Anthony Bonill's 'The Beginnings to 1929' and Reinhard Sander's 'The Thirties and Forties' combine a cataloguing of books with brief analyses of representative works. Bonill, discussing a period wherein the writers are primarily precursors and progenitors, is hard-pressed to find much of literary significance to say about their works. Sander discusses a more creative period, and he mingles sound observations on Mendes' and James's fiction with bibliographical details of the influential and incubative little magazines *Kyk-over-al*, *Focus*, *Bim*, and *Beacon*. Sandra Paquet has the task in a short chapter on the fifties of introducing the works of V.S. Reid, Roger Mau, John Hearne, Andrew Salkey, Ian Casew, Martin Carter, and Eric Roach. She puts

the emphasis on the writers' awareness of the social conditions of their particular place and time. Her analysis of their works is restrictively thematic. More comments on form and more evaluation would have been useful in this introductory piece. Edward Baugh eschews the sociological approach in 'Since 1960: Some Highlights'. He has some extremely fine readings of the works of the novelists Michael Anthony, Austin Clarke, and Garth St Omer, and of the poets Merwyn Morris, Anthony McNeil, Dennis Scott, and Wayne Brown. He even contrives to make comparisons with the more established writers (Clarke, for instance, with Selvon). Baugh evidently needed more space to do justice to these younger talents. The editor apparently allowed equal number of pages to the four survey chapters; it might have been better to have allocated space in proportion to the number of talents present in each period.

The novelists and poets honoured with separate chapters are those the editor and contributors considered the major West Indian writers. One could hardly fault their selection, though there are other names worthy of consideration. (It is interesting to note that ten years earlier Louis James's *Islands In Between* devoted chapters to Mair, Reid, Lamming, Walcott, Salkey, Hearne, Naipaul, and Harris. James's book, however, reflected the critical interest of the contributors rather than an editorial intention of selecting the important writers.) Devoting a chapter to Mittelholzer is appropriate. He needs to be reclaimed from the trap of popular fiction to which he has been relegated for too long. Faced with more than twenty books, Michael Gilkes succeeds in giving a fairly comprehensive survey of Mittelholzer's works, selecting *Corontyne Thunder*, *The Life and Death of Sphais*, *Morning at the Office*, and the *Kaywana* trilogy for more detailed consideration. Though Gilkes points to Mittelholzer's merits (the pioneering exploration of the West Indian's psychic imbalance, the vital portrayal of the natural setting), he is not always at ease when analysing the works of a writer he agrees is a novelist *manqué*. Another writer whose importance as a pioneer is unquestioned but whose works have not been analysed closely until recently is Selvon. Michel Fabre's introduction to his novels is clear and straightforward. He analyses each novel (the stories are ignored) putting the emphasis on *A Brighter Sun*, *The Lonely Londoners*, *Turn Again Tiger*, and *Movers Ascending*. Fabre is particularly sound in his analysis of *A Brighter Sun*. Jean Rhys — whose inclusion here might be questioned by some who see her as belonging more to British literature than to Caribbean literature despite her Caribbean experience and *Wide Sargasso Sea* — is given short-shift by Cheryl Dash's interpretation of her as a novelist concerned with minorities (women, and whites in the West Indies). This is one aspect of Rhys's writing which could be persuasively developed perhaps, but it is much too narrow an approach to make Dash's chapter anything more than a sketchy introduction to the complexities and riches of Rhys's novels.

The chapters on the writers who unquestionably constitute the core of any survey of Caribbean literature — Naipaul, Harris, Lamming, Walcott and Brathwaite — provide more or less comprehensive introductions despite the limited space. Hema Maas-Jelinek's essay is a useful exegesis of Harris' novels. The uninitiated reader would do well to keep her study handy when reading Harris. Maas-Jelinek allows a fair space to *Palace of the Peacock*, Harris' better-known and most accessible novel which 'contains in embryo all further developments'. Ian Munro's introduction to George Lamming and Bruce King's to V.S. Naipaul both have a thematic emphasis with little comment on form. Munro comments perceptively on Lamming's view of experience, but he is not always alert to Lamming's weaknesses — the opaque passages and the occasional persistent allegorising, for instance. King is aware of Naipaul's complex vision but his essay tends to portray

Naipaul more as a social historian than as a novelist. He sees *A House for Mr. Birney*, for instance, more as a socio-historical portrayal of the East Indian community than as an exploration of the struggles of the little man. King discusses the novels chronologically, and it should be noted that he misplaces *The Loss of El Dorado* (published 1969, not 1985) before instead of after *The Mimic Men*. The poet-critic Mervyn Morris (whose poems are discussed elsewhere in the book) writes a very sensitive introduction to Walcott's poems and plays, showing how pervasive is this poet's emerging ambivalent vision of life. Michael Dash proffers the thesis that Brathwaite's poetry focuses on human, personal, and artistic themes, and that he is not a political or folk poet. In so doing, Dash, though he acknowledges at one point that there are conflicting attitudes and tones in Brathwaite's poetry, imparts to him a voice that is too even and consistent. Incidentally, was *Rights of Passage* changed to *Rates of Passage*, the title used by Dash throughout his essay?

These studies of the major writers function as eight separate entities. No effort is made to correlate them with each other or with the earlier chapters. Consequently, the reader finds that on page 24 the major theme of Selvon's *A Brighter Sun* is 'the Indian-African question', while on page 111 it is the 'initiation into manhood and into a measure of intellectual and social awareness...'. On page 178 Naipaul's 'characters and their society are seen both from inside and outside, without excesses of criticism or sympathy', while on page 211 he is linked with writers who respond to the West Indies with 'violent protest or inveterate cynicism'. Introductory literary studies are always useful, more so when written by one author. Written by several hands, they tend to become — in defiance of the best editorial efforts — uneven, unconnected, and lacunae. Such, unfortunately, is the case with this book, which nevertheless is a welcome addition to Caribbean literary criticism.

VICTOR J. RAMRAJ

A.J. Seymour, ed., *A Treasury of Guyanese Poetry* (Georgetown: National Lithographic Co., 1980). 293 pp. n.p.a.

One of the most outstanding publications free of government rhetoric to have come out of Guyana recently is this collection of poetry. Embracing 150 years of the best poetry of the region, it seems likely to be one of the most comprehensive collections to appear in the Caribbean indicating that the creative spirit is alive and well. Apart from its eleven thematic sections, the collection contains two chronological divisions: from 1850 to 1950; and from 1940 to the present, the latter 'marking the emergence of the modern Guyana', as A.J. Seymour puts it.

Section I deals with people: with the blend of the six races of Guyana, which every school child in the country has ingrained in him from the moment he can read or write, despite the fact that the two major racial groups — the Indians and the Africans — have been at loggerheads with each other for most of modern Guyana's history. The people are described as being impoverished and labouring; the image of desolation and hardship, poignantly presented in Ian MacDonald's 'Uman Ali, Charcoal Seller', is juxtaposed and contrasted with the antipodal view of Guyana stemming from colonial vestiges which suggests that Guyana is still a halcyon land where all is splendid, and reinforces the Elizabethan notion of an idyllic El Dorado. The next section deals with love, both romantic

and natural. The two best poems here are Kenneth Tsharally's 'Sweet Love, I Live Dreaming', and Hugh Todd's 'To My Wife'. Both of these express with clarity the sincerity of emotion; they even go beyond, encompassing an element of mysticism. The other poems show love in the Victorian sense, displaying all the stock phrases, stock conceits, and banal apostrophising that one usually finds in a 'treasury'.

The children's thematic section, though the smallest, contains some of the best poetry. Here one finds Seymour's own 'One Day I fashioned a Royal Dream', with its charming mood of fantasy, magic, and simplicity, as well as Wilson Harris's very well-known poem, familiar to nearly all of Guyana's school children, 'Tell Me Trees what are you Whispering'. Most of the pieces are evocative of mood, feeling and landscape: like Martin Carter's 'For My Son', another familiar poem. The Nature Poems section makes similar evocations with unmistakable aesthetic resonance. 'Stanzas in the Water' by the pseudonymous Colonist matches the finest of the English Romantic poets. The romanticism persists in Seymour's own 'Carrion Crows' – vulturine scavengers – which in the author's eyes are perceived in flight 'winnowing the air like beauty come alive'. Nature is seen essentially as beautiful, rarely is it seen in any palpably harsh or virulent sense to be conquered by man's will. The notion of paradise persists, with the various place names now and again transmuted to song as part of the overall idealising tendency – which could more or less be due to the editor's own poetic preference in this anthology. The most significant poem in this section is David Campbell's 'An Arawak Indian of Guyana'. Campbell calls up the idea of a conventional paradise in unique terms, seen essentially in the final stanza of 'Sun Wheel' where he is able to fuse Amerindian shamanism with Christian imagery as he expresses his own despair, a despair based partly on his own uprootedness:

I see no crucifixions in this jungle
The passion flower sways soft on the south wind
And deer and sloth and cat and anaconda
Circle slowly in the green cathedral.
The secrets of the sun children all round me
Wait to save the wild world far away
But blinded by the snows of the north country
So long away I lose my way and stumble...

The historical section depicts Guyana's past of slavery and indentured servility. On the whole, the poems are about the suffering of the slaves as in 'Van Hoogenheim', or are tributary, in the case of the first East Indian immigrant woman by the late poet, Rajkumari Singh. But, as with the large number of poems in the previous section, these simultaneously combine lamentation with a hortatory tone.

The most vital section is 'Protest', which contains the best of Martin Carter's poems. Here the feelings are much stronger, more resonantly expressed. In Carter's 'I Come from the Nigger Yard' and 'University of Hunger' we see protest of the most poignant kind combined with lyricism and surrealism. Carter is often the wounded poet:

I come from the nigger yard of yesterday
leaping from the oppressor's hate
and the scorn of myself.
I come to the world with scars upon my soul
wounds on my body, fury in my hands.

The haunting lines combined with unique cadence and imagery make it a marvellously compelling poem.

The long streets of night move up and down
baring the thighs of a woman
and the cavern of a generation.
The beating drum returns and dies away.
The bearded men fall down and go to sleep.
The cocks of dawn stand up and crow like hughes.

is they who rose early in the morning
watching the moon die in the dawn.
is they who heard the shell blow and the iron clang
is they who had no voice in the emptiness
in the unbelievable
in the shadowless.
O long is the march of men and long is the life
and wide is the span.

Carter is a revolutionary poet who combines activism with his writing and more than once he has been in trouble with the security forces of the country who harassed him unnecessarily.

The next three sections comprising elegies, philosophy, and religion follow the timbre of the previous ones. The poems here worthy of attention are Jan Carew's 'Requiem for my Sister', a somewhat overly long poem describing the author's truths about life, going back to history and religion ('Our people bore the mark of Cain/ Bodies were hollow logs of bone, the skin stretched tight as a drum...'), and Kenneth Tabarally's 'My Brother with the Lightning of his Hand'.

Of significance in the religious section is Wilson Harris's poetry — deriving from that author's long poem, 'The Sun', which uses as its matrix Greek mythology, fused with his personal vision and Christian resonance to express an almost primeval utterance couched, as it is, in a sophisticated frame of reference.

The final section — Narrative — has the two significant poems, 'The Legend of the Kaiteur', by Seymour, and the much-neglected 'Ruth', by Leo Martin, one of the pioneering voices of Guyanese poetry.

The *Treasury of Guyanese Poetry* is a significant collection which has put together in book form much of the best of Guyanese poetry, coupled with an index of writers and first lines to help the casual reader as well as the scholar to identify quickly the poems of his choice. Perhaps, because most of the best poems have already been published in one form or another and are thus fairly well-known — especially to a Guyanese readership — another collection in a few years' time with selections from some of the more up-to-date works by the newer voices should be undertaken to give a more solid picture of the strength of Guyanese poetry. In such a book, for instance, those writers who are expatriates, and who have made advances in their technique, would add an even more significant value to the thriving spirit of Guyanese poetry.

CYRIL DABYDEEN

Peter Wolfe, *Jean Rhys*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980. 186 pp., \$10.95.

Peter Wolfe's study of Jean Rhys is one in a recent spate of critical works on the writer whose small cult following is increasing rapidly in the U.S. and the U.K. Indicative of the growing recognition of Rhys as an important twentieth-century literary figure is the Modern Language Association's decision to authorize a special session commemorating her work during the December 1981 meetings in New York City.

Wolfe clearly defines the threefold aim of his book as seeking the unity of Rhys's individual works, defining her artistry through her whole development, and comparing this development to that of other women fiction writers of our century. He examines Rhys's relatively short canon in chronological order and credits his methodology with revealing Jean Rhys as a developing artist. Wolfe sees in Rhys's early books the roots of the technical control of her later phase — a control which he perceives as strengthening Rhys's vision 'while sharpening her narrative economy'.

Wolfe writes with vigour and authority in a colloquial prose style using contemporary American English and the language of popular psychoanalysis. He pays substantial attention to stylistic and structural concerns and subscribes to the general critical appreciation for Rhys's prose economy, control of tone, and freedom from sentimentality. Writing from a Modern Literature point-of-view rather than from a Commonwealth Literature perspective, Wolfe dwells less upon the West Indian aspects of Rhys's biography and fiction than do the earlier critical overviews by Louis James and Thomas Staley.

It is evident that Wolfe has thoroughly reviewed extant criticism on Rhys and he incorporates into his book the most useful items from his research. This makes the book especially useful for Rhys students and teachers because it serves the secondary function of presenting in context recent British and American views of Rhys's writing. Despite Wolfe's evident familiarity with secondary sources, his selected bibliography is disappointingly short: it contains only a dozen citations, most of which — like A. Alvarez's *New York Times Book Review* piece and V.S. Naipaul's *New York Review of Books* item — are well-known and frequently cited elsewhere.

In addition, a Chronology precedes the text, but it is curiously uneven. For example, while it dates the death of Rhys's second husband, it fails to date the deaths of her first and third husbands. And while it dates Rhys's W.H. Smith literary award and her Arts Council of Great Britain Award for Writers, it neglects to note that Rhys was named a Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 1978 for her services to literature. Further, the dating of Rhys's moves to Cornwall and to Devon — important material for establishing a reliable Rhys biography — are questionable.

Wolfe opens his analysis by grouping together the collected short stories of Rhys's early and late careers, tracing common denominators. He also discusses the uncollected stories 'I Spy a Stranger' and 'Temps Perdu', but he misses the ambivalence of the latter by forcing it into his overview of Rhys's 'dreadiness and dislocation'. He adds a valuable dimension to Rhys criticism in his analysis of *Quartet*, Rhys's first novel, by relating it to Ford Madox Ford's novel *The Good Soldier*. He shows, too briefly perhaps, how both novels reflect the circumstances of the Ford-Rhys affair, thereby providing a framework for future scholarly examination.

Identifying death as the thematic connection between *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* and *Voyage in the Dark*, Wolfe focuses upon the Rhysian heroine's fall from virtue into

prostitution. Although he acknowledges that much of *Voyage in the Dark* 'consists of Anna's recollections of her island girlhood', Wolfe ignores the West Indian material of the novel, choosing to stress instead the heroine's 'real world' career. Citing Ralph Tyler, Sara Blackburn, V.S. Naipaul, Francis Wyndham, A. Alvarez, Judith Thurman, Francis Hope, Elgin Meltdown, Marcelle Bernstein and Mary Canewell on *Good Morning, Midnight*, Wolfe agrees with the critics in praise of the fourth novel and concludes that it 'marks a peak for Jean Rhys'.

Wolfe moves through Rhys's West Indian classic, *Wide Sargasso Sea*. In the order of its narrative events, He concentrates upon the sexuality in the novel, lapsing into unfortunate cultural clichés about white men lusting after black women and 'civilized English minds' that 'cannot cope with the tropics'. Following his restatement of the novel's narrative line, Wolfe ties Rhys's novel to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. He shows the consistency of Rhys's portrayal of Rochester with Brontë's and he identifies Rochester as the important link between the two novels, convincingly showing how 'the Rochester of *Sargasso* calls into question posterity's attitude toward him'.

Whereas Wolfe goes behind *Wide Sargasso Sea* to the novelist, asserting that Rhys questions Rochester's sexual maturity, Wolfe does not go beyond the characters of Brontë's novel to Brontë herself. Of great value in this respect, as an example, is Michael Thorpe's recognition ('The Other Side', *Arist*, July 1977, p. 101) that Brontë's mad Circé woman is an expression of the master-of-fact racial prejudice that Brontë shared with her Victorian audience. Indeed, Brontë's Bertha Mason Rochester is an extension of the same stereotype Brontë invokes in *The Professor* where she describes one of her student characters as having 'loose ringlets of abundant but somewhat coarse hair over her rolling black eyes; parting her lips, as full as those of a hot-blooded Maroon, she showed her well-set teeth sparkling between them'. This, in turn, reminds the reader of Thackeray's passionate West Indian student in *Fanny Hill* — 'Miss Swartz, the rich woolly-haired mulatto from St Kitts'. It is such British social and literary condescension toward colonials and foreigners that stimulated Rhys to liberate Antoinette from the attic where Brontë had imprisoned her.

ELAINE CAMPBELL

Michael Anthony, *All That Glitters*. Andre Deutsch, London, 1981. 202 pp. £5.95.

I see myself principally as a story teller. In other words I am not aware that I have any message. I think both the past life and the fascination of landscape play a most important part in my work.

Michael Anthony

Michael Anthony's strength as a writer lies in his capacity to recreate, with remarkable freshness and sensibility, places, characters, and events from the Trinidad of his youth ('past life') and to evoke beautifully the landscapes of his native country. His art of memory, vivid and unsurpassed, is what strikes the reader in his latest novel *All That*

Glinters. It records a few weeks in the life of a thirteen-year-old boy, Horace Lumpsum, who lives with his widowed mother in Mayaro, a village on the Atlantic coast of Trinidad. *All That Glitters* is narrated in the first person, and from beginning to end the experiencing consciousness is that of the boy. People and places are seen 'objectively' through his eyes and subjectively in terms of his responses to them. Horace is a perceptive and inquisitive boy, but given to dreaming and 'imagining' which often makes him fail to see details that are right under his nose. He reveals a marked uncertainty about adult motives, actions, and relationships, as when he is initiated in the scheme against the villain of the book, Sergeant Cordner:

Uncle had got worked up and now his eyes were bloodshot and fierce. I was feeling fierce, too. I had realised, of course, that Sarge wanted to disgrace Cordner, not so much because of the gold chain itself, but for a reason which I was not very clear about. Or was it really because of the gold chain and because of us? I did not know. Whatever the reason, though, that gold chain was not lost, but was there, in Tobago with Cordner, and we should soon hold it, glittering, in our very hands. My heart was thumping as I stood there. I could hardly wait for the dawn to break.

However, Michael Anthony's artistic control is so tight that never once does he impose an adult's perception on his child narrator.

All That Glitters tells the story of the return of Horace's favourite Aunt Rosem who brings into the world of Mayaro not only her warmth, love and affection, but also the gift of a gold chain which could make the family's dreams of a better and richer life come true. However, the chain disappears under mysterious circumstances and it is the unravelling of this crime that constitutes the bulk of the novel. We follow Horace in his desperate attempts to throw light on the mystery and to make 'sense of all the nonsense' that he feels surrounds him. But the novel is not a detective story; it is primarily an exploration of family affections, rivalries and jealousies, and an account of a boy's groping towards an understanding of life and life's 'little games'. At the end of the novel Horace has come to understand a certain section of his community, but there is no attempt on Michael Anthony's part to suggest that the boy has reached maturity. He is in the process of growing up, of learning about life and the true values of life; when we leave him he has grasped the meaning of 'all that glitters is not gold' (in all its aspects); the proverb to him is no longer just a sentence to be analysed and parsed in grammar classes.

All That Glitters will remind readers of Michael Anthony's early novel *The Year in San Fernando*. It offers an equally brilliant evocation of childhood experiences, showing the difficulties of growing up and coming to terms with the various forces that shape the individual, changing his attitude towards himself and the world at large. Built-in with the account of the boy's development is a pattern of growth of the West Indian consciousness, of a growing into awareness of the West Indies as a nation. Michael Anthony has once again proved himself to be a master of the 'childhood novel' which is an important and integral part of the literary tradition of the West Indies. He has a good ear for the spoken language, and this, combined with his character portrayal and description of place, makes *All That Glitters* a book well worth reading.

ANNEMARIE BACKMANN

C.K. Stead, *Five for the Symbol*. Longman Paul, Auckland, New Zealand, 1981. 167 pp.

Commenting on the title of his latest volume, Carl Stead writes: 'Perhaps the best symbol for this collection of stories is the pentagram, a five-pointed figure which can be drawn without lifting the pen from the page... The five points of the star go in five directions yet they are unified. There is one centre, one subject, one symbol.' The author has pursued his quest for meaning through various media: his poetry has received much praise with *Whether the Will is Free* (Paul, 1964), *Crossing the Bar* (Auckland and Oxford University Press, 1972), *Quasado* (The Shed, 1975) and *Walking Westward* (The Shed, 1978). He has also edited the second volume of *New Zealand Short Stories* (Oxford University Press, 1967), *Letters and Journals of Katherine Mansfield* (Penguin, 1977) and published a casebook on *Measure for Measure* (Macmillan, 1971). In academic circles he holds a well-deserved reputation for *The New Poetic* (Hutchinson, 1964), a critical examination of the evolution of poetry from Yeats to Eliot. In the field of fiction, he has written *Smith's Dream* (Longman Paul, 1971), a novel which imagines New Zealand overrun by a ruthless dictator who has managed to cultivate the acquiescence if not the acceptance of his fellow-citizens. The hero, who thinks he has escaped from it all on an isolated island of the Hauraki Gulf, is forced into unwilling, then active involvement.

Five for the Symbol has no explicit political content. It is organised with three masculine and two feminine narrators, thus explicitly evoking Pythagorean connotations, five, the 'perfect' number, representing the marriage of the first masculine number (3) with the first feminine number (2). Written between 1959 and 1979, the stories deal with the problems, both personal and social, which a young New Zealander has to face. In 'A Race Apart' (1959), a record-winner Kiwi athlete takes up a job as a chauffeur in an English country mansion. The epitome of British gentry is made to meet an antipodean type, the fit sportsman who has 'made it' to the 'old country'. These characters could become amusing clichés in a gentle comedy of manners. C.K. Stead certainly enjoys the minor scandal caused by the discovery of the champion skipping about in the fields with the aristocratic daughter of the family. Yet the lightness of the tone is usually counter-balanced by a genuine interest in the meeting of two worlds which shed light on one another's foibles. The reader follows the plot through the eyes of the Lady of the House who, like her creator, builds up her story with tiny particles of memory which, on the point of turning into perfect constructions, run the constant risk of instant annihilation: '...each memory I watched was like a metal sphere, in orbit around me. The sphere existed, indissolubly itself, and I had no idea what its circumference closed upon. But I felt that the threat of destruction hung about it' (p. 23).

In 'A Fitting Tribute' (1964), the woman narrator tells of her lover, a great man whom everyone reveres because he has made New Zealand famous; he has equalled Icarus in his dream to fly with his own wings made up, this time, of parts from pilfered umbrellas. Julian Harp has disappeared over the volcanic cone of Rangitoto into a world of disincarnate public adulation. In a country which has suffered for so long from colonial complexes, every description of the life of a great inventor which might make him less than superhuman is obliterated. The self-centred dreamer has sacrificed the lives of his girl-friend and child and has thus gone into history. C.K. Stead's story gently satirises New Zealand's propensity for worshipping heroes of the 'Man Alone' type. Julian Harp belongs to the public and the public will not see the unpleasant side of the character. 'But if you ever came out of a building and found your umbrella missing you might like to

believe my story because it may mean that you contributed a strut to the wings that carried him aloft' (p. 62).

'The Town' (1974) draws heavily on the Mediterranean landscape and English-speaking community of Menton in which the author spent some time as a Katherine Mansfield Fellow. Through different strands of fragmented stories which all centre on the accident in which the narrator's Fiat overturned and caught fire, a whole community of exiles, estate-agents and crooks is described. This new journey of apprenticeship appears as a mystery tale which is explored through disjointed flashes of perception. Perhaps because of the relative foreignness of his material here, C.K. Sead does not sound as convincing and as profound as in the other stories. 'The Town' does not always avoid stereotypes. In spite of this the problems of loneliness and of difficult human intercourse are examined in very moving terms.

'A Quality of Life' (1969) is the masterpiece of this fine collection. The narrator, a novelist, is about to burn the story he has written of his impossible love for young Verna who is engaged to a successful businessman. Far from opposing the 'good' intellectual and the 'bad' capitalist, the author manages to fashion his characters into extremely complex creations, touching but also ridiculous at times in their naive youthful self-assurance. The men realize that a woman is more than merely a prey which one chases to prove one's 'normality'. As the story develops, certainties gradually crumble. A subtle link builds up between the narrator and Verna, which transcends their blundering and finally unsuccessful attempts at linking up. An intimate and complex relationship is formed through and beyond the flesh. The narrator finally realizes that his novel has been mostly an attempt to cure his disappointments in life. 'As I took it to the incinerator I wondered why I had ever supposed I could possess in art what life had denied me' (p. 138).

'A New Zealand Elegy' (1979) traces the development of a friendship between two Auckland boys who come to political and sexual awareness with the onset of the Korean war. Their dreams of a better society form the background of their rivalry to be the first to 'fuck' a woman. Their teen-age fantasies end tragically with the accidental death of the narrator's pal who rides his motor-cycle into the back end of a truck where Marion, the sexually arousing neighbour, is embracing her lover.

In these stories, C.K. Sead exposes certain socially transmitted features which reproduce fixed patterns of behaviour. Growing up involves learning the necessity to abandon simple answers in favour of complex questions. Humour and a desire to pursue his questioning as far as it leads him enable the author to raise fundamental issues and to deal with them brilliantly. Because of their emblematic quality, these five sketches enrich our understanding of contemporary New Zealand much in the same way as Frank Sargeson's stories help us to understand the atmosphere of the thirties.

J.P. DURIX

Maurice Gee, *Mag*, Faber & Faber, 1981. 251 pp. £5.95.

Despite the fact that he had written four novels and one collection of short stories (all published in England) Maurice Gee remained virtually unknown outside his native New Zealand until the publication of *Pharo* in 1978. This novel not only won him three major

awards in New Zealand but also the James Tait Memorial Prize in Britain. It told the story of George Plumb, former Presbyterian minister, Christian Socialist, militant pacifist and finally freethinker — searching always for the truth and following the dictates of his conscience no matter what the consequences either to himself, his wife or his twelve children.

Meg is a sequel to *Plumb*. The narrator is the youngest daughter, Meg, and she, like so many of Gee's characters, looks back to the past in order to define and understand her place in the present. Through a series of flashbacks and reminiscences she tells the story of the other Plumbs — not all of them, for several had left for America and one had died — but of those who remained in New Zealand. It is on the whole a depressing picture. Gee continues to explore the theme which has become central to his work, that of personal relationships, their subtle cruelty, even their savagery, all of them conducted within the structures and confines of the nuclear family. The central figure of the father continues to hold them together. They were all conscious of being Plumbs and that to be a Plumb was to be special. Even Alfred who had changed his name when his father banished him because of his homosexuality gives his name as Plumb when he is being kicked to death by a pack of gay-bashers.

At the conclusion of the novel Meg's brother Robert dies. Their father had written the sermon to be read at the burial. It read as follows: 'Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations.... Thou turnest man to destruction, and sayest, Return ye children of men.' George Plumb would fail to see the irony here but in one way we could say that this is what the book is about. For it shows all the children living in the shadow of their Old Testament patriarchal father, unable to free themselves from him or the Puritan morality that dominates so much of New Zealand life. Plumb continues to dominate their lives as in a way he dominates Meg and even this review. It doesn't quite measure up to the quality of *Plumb* but it is still a fine novel well worth reading.

ANNA RUTHERFORD

Nelson Wattie, *Nation und Literatur. Eine Studie zur Bestimmung der nationalen Merkmale literarischer Werke am Beispiel von Katherine Mansfields Kurzgeschichten*. Bouvier Verlag Herbert Grundmann, Bonn, 1980. DM36.00.

Is it possible to detect national features in works of literature? and if yes, is it useful to do so? These are the questions Nelson Wattie sets out to answer in his study of *Nation und Literatur*.

The relationship between nationality and literature has been obscured by the effects of nationalism, and Nelson Wattie recognizes the necessity of distinguishing sharply between the terms 'nationalistic' and 'national' and of applying only the latter in literary criticism. The literary critic must 'avoid bringing preconceived ideas into the interpretation of literary works by first determining the characteristics of a nation and then seeking them in the works'. What he should do — and this is more difficult but also more

rewarding — is to examine the 'characteristics of the works and then decide which of them may justifiably be called «national». It is, of course, important to realize that a 'nation' is not an objectively definable entity; however, it is Nelson Wattie's thesis that every work of literature through its internal characteristics may imply that it is a part of a national literature and 'in doing so contribute to the constitution of that literature'.

Nation und Literatur falls into two main parts which correspond to Nelson Wattie's twofold aim:

Die vorliegende Arbeit will das Phänomen der nationalen Ambiguität bei solchen Schriftstellern (d.h. Schriftsteller ohne eindeutige Nationalität) untersuchen, weil man sich dadurch eine Klärung der Frage der nationalen Merkmale literarischer Werke im Allgemeinen erhoffen kann. Die Untersuchung von Mansfield's Kurzgeschichten im zweiten Teil ist deswegen als exemplarisch für das Problem zu verstehen, das im ersten Teil in allgemeiner Form besprochen wird.

In the first part of his study, which contains a rather theoretical discussion of general problems of literary theory, Nelson Wattie defines 'national literature' as 'die Summe der literarischen Werke deren nationale Eigenschaften vorwiegend einer bestimmten Nation zuzuordnen sind'. Realizing the difficulty — or impossibility — of dealing with a national literature as a whole, he goes on to define and clarify what is meant by 'nationale Eigenschaften eines Werkes' (national features/characteristics of a particular work of literature), and to work out a method for determining the 'nationality' of a literary work. He chooses four areas/criteria which must necessarily be examined if one wants to establish the nationality of a particular work: the author, the language, the content, and the reader. In each of the four areas it is, however, possible (and desirable) to distinguish between several layers of locality: (1) the national layer, (2) the individual/personal one, and (3) the international/universal layer. Adopting this 'Schichtenmodell' as a basis for the presentation of the problems, Nelson Wattie endeavours to avoid the following dangers: the leaving out or suppression of national features (first layer) where they exist; the over evaluation of such features at the cost of the literary qualities pertaining to the individual writer (second layer); or literary qualities of a more universal nature (third layer).

In the second part of the book he goes on to illustrate the above points (author, language, content, reader) by the short stories of Katherine Mansfield whom he considers an interesting example because of her 'national ambiguity': some readers/critics see her as an essentially English writer, others as a New Zealand one. This section offers some lucid and valuable analyses of a number of her stories, interesting readings because of the new and somewhat untraditional approach to her works. Nelson Wattie tries to refute the generally accepted image of Katherine Mansfield as a rebellious young girl. He shows that the theory of two 'breaks' in Mansfield's life — her rejection of New Zealand and later her return and renewed attachment to it — is an untenable one. Her relationship to her country and her home were tense and ambivalent, but they remained essentially the same throughout her life. There is no proof (in her works and journals) of her rejection of her home country in 1907-08. Her journey to England was not a rejection of the New Zealand nation within her, but only of her family and other New Zealanders like her family. In his analysis of the narrative structure of Katherine Mansfield's short stories, Nelson Wattie shows that the author is 'ironically detached when handling English, French or German situations, but emotionally involved when handling New Zealand ones'.

Nelson Wattie's study is a valuable contribution to the general theory of literature as well as to the field of Commonwealth literature. It is a very scholarly work and as such probably of more interest to the 'expert' than to the 'general reader'. The notes and bibliography shows thoughtful selection of material and a comprehensive range of reading. One may say that his main achievement is to have shown the value of such an approach to literature. His approach (based as it is on a 'Schichtenmodell') can offer new and valuable insights into the nature of literature. It is a useful approach, especially in cases of 'nationaler Ambiguität der Schriftsteller'; one must, however, bear in mind, as the author rightly points out, that

the national features, although sometimes of major importance, are by no means the whole work. They stand between individual, personal features of style on the one hand and international or even universal features on the other. Not by denying these other layers as the nationalists do, nor by denying the national layer as anti-nationalists may, but by a sober critical assessment of the density of all layers and their relationship to each other, can one hope to attain an objective and accurate picture of the 'local features' of a work of literary art.

His study must be regarded as a welcome addition to the works of criticism on one of New Zealand's major literary figures.

ANNEMARIE BACKMANN

Clare Hanson and Andrew Gurr, *Katherine Mansfield*. Macmillan Commonwealth Writers Series, general editor A. N. Jeffares, Macmillan, London and Basingstoke, 1981. 150 pp. £4.95 paperback, £10.00 hardcover edition.

Katherine Mansfield has had her devotees since the 1920s, and for many years the cult was fed by John Middleton Murry, her husband and editor, whose selections from her letters and notebooks constructed an image of her which was to a large extent a fabrication. The unhealthy web has been cleared away over the past two decades thanks to the work of a handful or two of biographers, editors and critics. More work is in progress, but this is a good moment to take stock of the situation, and that is what Clare Hanson and Andrew Gurr do in their recent study, published in the Macmillan Commonwealth Writers Series.

As an independent critical study the book is excellent, showing great familiarity with Katherine Mansfield's work and its background, and offering a number of very perceptive readings of her stories. Whether it will serve as a useful guide also for students in secondary schools and liberal arts colleges (as the publishers' blurb claims) is another matter. The authors seem to be addressing a university audience, and only occasionally cast uneasy glances — in the Notes section — in the direction of the less initiated reader, who needs to have words like 'Ichtmotif' explained to him but is expected to take 'deserts of vast eternity' (page 77) in his stride.

The book is divided into four chapters. The introduction gives some biographical information, describes the literary milieu Katherine Mansfield moved in, and rather sketchily discusses some of the problems facing the scholar interested in her life and work. The remaining chapters take up a selection of the stories in chronological order, thus tracing the development of the artist. The interpretations of individual stories are always thoughtful and often contain penetrating insights. All the major stories receive careful treatment, although 'The Fly' (a 'flawed' story) is given short shrift. The two authors throughout concentrate on symbols rather than characters, in keeping with their well-made point that the strongest literary influence on Katherine Mansfield was the Symbolism of the 1890s and later, not Chekhov. Hence — in this context of criticism too — the importance of her New Zealand childhood (page 16).

There is no doubt that she worked at her highest creative level on material that was removed from her in space and time. This is because she was a Symbolist writer, interested not in social contexts and realities, but in the imaginative discovery or recreation of the ideal hidden within the real.

ANDERS IVERSEN

Zulfikar Ghose, *Hulme's Investigations into the Bogart Script*. Austin and New York: Curbstone Press, 1981. 158 pp. \$4.95.

In his 'Author's Note' Ghose quotes from Wittgenstein's 'On Certainty', and Malcolm Lowry's '...what the story is all about, who the protagonist may be, seems of less account beside the explosion of the particular moment...' As such, some of the familiar contemporary mythology and popular culture (Western) are recast in eight continuous, intertextual scripts subtly phased into one another, with the characters and situations multiplying and recreating themselves as if Nature had been spawned by an intelligent Camera. As narrative, the script is a clever device allowing the fish-eye use of the familiar lens to achieve simultaneity — and a reduced time-scale in which to make things happen: similarly, a good deal of stage direction, the commentary, can be incorporated in the story without a traffic hazard: in short, the functions and freedoms of 'photographic memory' (p. 140), which can, at the same time, pick out the particular moment.

So our narrator, Walt, reads a lead in a London newspaper: that, in connection with a recent kidnap-rape-murder case, 'Inspector Hulme is leading the investigation into the extraordinary circumstances surrounding the case which involves such puzzlingly disparate factors as a desert tribe, jet-setting movie stars, and the world of art' (pp. 7-8). Hulme's case was supposed to be between London and Tunis. But the same Hulme turns out to be Walt's double, foil and collaborator, when Walt himself is engaged in his criminal/ human/ artistic investigations on the American continent. Foul perversions of sex-and-marriage, the craze for money, the futility of dogmas, and the debasement of land and 'nature' by human avarice and possessiveness are not all entirely new in Ghose as fit themes for fiction, but this new novel, his seventh, marks an advance in story-telling and gives all he touches a contemporary focus: 'This is California, sweetie, it's the end of

the world. Their fantasies, reality and scripts are all mixed up... (p. 148). The search for gold in the desert is a recurrent theme, and several strands of identity, time and place — the immutable *essences*, come together at the end as Walt, upon being asked 'what have you found, gold?', replies to Rosemary with a positive (though non committal) 'Maybe'. How Walt finds it in the American earth is perhaps the main story:

I went to the stream and, lying on its bank,
lowered my face to its rushing water, scooping
up the water in cupped hands and splashing it
to my face.

— So that's where you are! I heard Rosemary's
voice behind me. I was afraid you'd taken
fright and run away, she added, coming up to
the stream, too.

— From then? I said, speaking into the clear,
cool water in my hands. (p. 158)

No, that was only that particular moment.

ALAMGIR HASHMI

Jack Mapanje, *Of Chameleons and Gods*. Heinemann, 1981. 80 pp.
£1.95.

In an article in *Kanopyi*, Vol. 1, No 2, 1979 about the new Malawian poetry Angus Calder traces the publication history — or perhaps rather deplores the lack of it — of this group of poets who have suffered the curious fate of having been made the subject of serious literary criticism before they have gone into print on any significant scale, and he hints that 'happily, it now seems quite likely that a major multinational will produce either a volume by Mapanje, or an anthology, or even both'. Well, the cat is out of the bag: the multinational was Heinemann, and they opted for a volume by Mapanje. The 1971 promise of a small locally printed anthology has taken ten years to reach the dizzy heights of a multinational.

The reasons for this are to be found in the machinations of politics and business and certainly not in the quality of the poetry, which is excellent. One obvious problem is the Malawian censorship which rules out direct political comments. Jack Mapanje comments on this indirectly in his brief introduction. After having stated that the poems are an attempt to 'find a voice or voices as a way of preserving some sanity', he continues 'Obviously where personal voices are too easily muffled, this is a difficult task'. Hence the chameleon of the title.

Curiously enough, Jack Mapanje's voice seems a good deal more personal than that of his more fortunate colleagues, the writers in East African countries with little or no censorship, and the Southern African writers in exile. Angus Calder suggests that the necessity to avoid being strident and glib about obvious 'social' and 'political' themes

accounts for the greater care with poetic expression, and Adrian Roscoe (*Uhuru's Fire*, C.U.P., 1977) finds that Malawian poetry 'prefers a quieter tone and a less public posture than its East African equivalents' (pp. 155-56).

I do not wish to turn this review into a eulogy for censorship, but both the poetry itself and Jack Mapanje's comment seem to bear this out. A major theme in the poetry is a criticism of the country's political development since Independence, including such well-known themes as corruption, the degradations of city life and misuse of power. These criticisms are, however, couched in traditional terms or suggested as analogies to local myths. 'Song of Chickens' is an example of this:

Master, you talked with bows,
Arrows and catapults once
Your hands steaming with hawk blood
To protect your chicken.

Why do you talk with knives now,
Your hands teeming with eggshells
And hot blood from your own chicken?
Is it to impress your visitors?

This mixture of Gods and Chameleons induces a quiet tone, not just out of fear, but out of a sense of responsibility and perhaps even personal failure at the poet's impotence in the face of the powers that be. 'The New Platform Dancers' starts with an affirmation of the poet's/ persona's personal worth:

Haven't I danced the big dance
Compelled the rains so dust could
Soar high above like when animals
Stampede?

The negative question which is a distinctive stylistic feature of the poetry, turns the self-affirmation into a question of self and a plea for acceptance, and the poem ends on a note of quiet despair:

Why do I sit still
Why does my speech choke
Like I have not danced
Before? Haven't I
Danced the bigger dance?
Haven't I?

Irony and bitterness seem obvious answers to such a situation, but although these sentiments are present they are not the dominant tone of the poetry. There is a tenderness and a concern with the lives of ordinary people which can not be attributed to the benefits of censorship, but must be the poet's own contribution. Protest can take many forms, and in Jack Mapanje's pen it can even take on the form of beauty. 'Requiem to a Fallen Son' epitomises these virtues. It describes the joy at the birth of the 'Fallen son' in terms of a traditional village celebration, and it leaves the protest and the hurt as an implication

which gains its strength from the beauty of the poetry in describing the event. It says more about the quality of Jack Mapanje's poetry than any critical praise.

...For I saw, I felt, I smelt nothing
But the happiness of men and women
Reeling to taut drums
Roaring in jubilation of your birth, Son.

KIRSTEN HOLST PETERSEN

Buchi Emecheta, *The Moonlight Bride* and *The Wrestling Match*.
Ibadan, O.U.P. in association with University Press Ltd., 1980. £1.50
each pb.

Buchi Emecheta, writing from a continent with few women authors, is becoming a better novelist all the time. Like many good writers her work is beginning to separate into two distinct strains, in her case adult fiction and stories for children. In both she has an ability to seem dateless and yet apt for the modern world. Indeed, her most recent novel for adults, *The Joys of Motherhood*, has more to say about African womanhood today, though it takes place forty and more years ago, than almost any other Nigerian work published in the last few years — certainly more than the semi-autobiographies, *In the Ditch* and *Second Class Citizen*, which established her reputation. Emecheta's first two books drew on her experiences as a mother of five children, newly arrived in London from Nigeria and obliged to take on the British social Welfare system without the support of a partner. Her writing for adults has been unaggressively feminist, but now she is turning more frequently to story telling aimed specifically at children. Several Nigerian authors, including Chinua Achebe and Cyprian Ekwensi, have had the versatility to appeal both to grown-ups and to children, but Buchi Emecheta seems especially at ease with her young readers.

The Moonlight Bride and *The Wrestling Match* are ideal reading for any child between about six and sixteen — a wide age range because the tales are short, quickly paced and about sympathetic young people whose ages are not precisely stated. In most African households where books in English are to be found, they are unlikely yet to have reached that Polly Toynbee-esque Utopia where little boys play with dollies and little girls with Lego garages. One is probably safe, therefore, in recommending *The Wrestling Match* to young men and *The Moonlight Bride* to young women. Both tales are about preparations, for a fight between villages (which ends in confusion) and for a marriage (which promises harmony). Both carry a hint of allegorical morality — that war has no victors and that beauty is in the eye of the beholder — but I doubt if many readers will feel that they are being preached at.

There is more skill in Buchi Emecheta's story-telling for the young than many people probably realise. I have been privileged to hear her at the Africa Centre in London holding enthralled a room full of five-year olds as she recreates the Ibo tales of her own youth. Her audience for *The Wrestling Match* and *The Moonlight Bride* is likely to be a little older but also predominantly African. They will respond to the lack of fuss and to

the total absence of false drama in her stories. Though one character accidentally has her ear cut off by her doting father there is virtually no exaggerated incident here. The tales hold our attention because ordinary young people are experiencing normal reactions to special but not unlikely occasions. We have mystery (who is the bride to be?), comedy (the car), excitement (deadly snakes) and, especially in *The Wrestling Match* with its reminders of the Nigerian Civil War, an element of unsententious moralising. These are stories for readers who have never heard of Stansky and Hirsch, who can still feel a thrill in dressing up, and who look on parents as rather bossy but in the end to be obeyed because they usually know best.

Though Buchi Emecheta's readership for these two books is likely to be mainly African and juvenile, she deserves to be read elsewhere. She has a vivid capacity to render Ibo society through small descriptive details without making her tales of interest exclusively to Ibo readers. I doubt if anyone would find the names or the customs a serious stumbling-block to their enjoyment of *The Wrestling Match* and *The Moonlight Bride* because the behaviour of the characters rings so true. On the other hand, these are not sophisticated tales either in their subject or the method of their telling and for that reason an adult unfamiliar with Emecheta's work would do much better to start on *The Japs of Motherhood*. Both the new stories, however, could be usefully read in schools or given to voracious children who believe there is more to imagine than television has to offer. Because they are so unpretentious they may easily stimulate several young readers to try composing stories themselves.

ALASTAIR NIVEN

The Next Issue Includes:

INTERVIEWS: Doris Lessing, Ezekiel Mphahlele, Alice Munro.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY: Buchi Emecheta.

PROSE AND POETRY: Tony Cosier, John Clanchy, Mark O'Connor, Michael Sharkey, Anthony Nazombe. Extract from Elma Napier's unpublished novel *Calibishie Chronicle*.

ARTICLES: on Thea Astley, Jean Rhys, David Malilla, R.A.K. Mason, Stephen Black, Elma Napier.

CHECKLIST: on works of criticism on the image of Africa, Africans, and Blacks of the African diaspora in Western literature.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

May-Brüt Akerholt teaches at Macquarie University, Sydney. *Abson Croggan* — Australian poet. *Susan Gardner* teaches at the African Studies Centre, University of Witwatersrand. *Donald W. Hannah* teaches at Aarhus University. *Bernice Lever* is the editor of *Waves*. She has published poems, short stories, and articles and edited an anthology of women's writing from Canadian prisons. *Bill Manhire* — New Zealand poet who teaches at Victoria University, Wellington. *E.A. Markham* — poet and short story writer. Assistant editor of *Ambit*. *Mbulelo Mzamane* is South African, at present doing research at Sheffield University. He is both a poet and short story writer. *Anthony Nazombe* is Malawian and at the moment is a post-graduate student at the University of Sheffield. *Mark O'Connor* — Australian poet and short story writer. His most recent publication is a volume of poetry, *The Eating Tree*. *Kalu Oghaa* has recently completed his doctorate at the University of Texas at Austin and is now teaching at Imo State University, Nigeria. *Thomas Shapcott* — Australian poet, recently chosen to represent Australia on the Australian-Canadian Writers' Exchange Scheme. *Richard I. Smyer* teaches at the University of Arizona, Tucson. *John Thieme* teaches at the Polytechnic of North London. *Robyn Wallace* teaches at Newcastle University, New South Wales.

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